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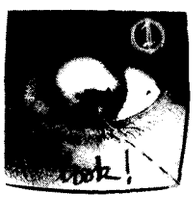

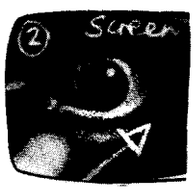

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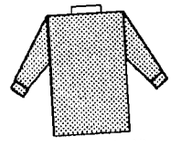

Royal blue with white collar, as worn by Joe Royle & Brian Labone.

Leeds United, white with LUFC embroidered in blue. As worn by Charlton & Bremner.

Leeds United Away, Yellow with LUFC embroidered in blue.

Sky blue, white collar & cuffs, as worn by Lee, Summerbee & Bell.

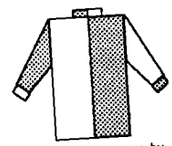
Red & black stripes, as worn by Lee, Bell & Summerbee on Awaydays.

Red with white collar & cuffs, as worn by George Best & Bobby Charlton.

Red & white stripes, red collar & cuffs, as worn by Ian Porterfield & Dave Watson.

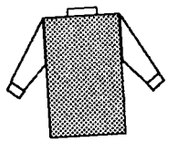
Sky blue with blue & white striped collar & cuffs, as worn by Willie Carr & Jeff Blockley.

Red & white stripes, red collar & cuffs, as worn by Eddie Colquhuon & Tony Currie.


Blue & white, as worn by Bryan Conlon & Stuart Metcalfe.

Black & white stripes as worn by Bobby Moncur & Malcolm MacDonald.

Claret body & cuffs, sky blue arms & collar. As worn by Steve Kindon & Martin Dobson.


Blue with white arms, collar & cuffs. As worn by Peter Eustace & Jack Witham.

Red with white collar & cuffs, as worn by Don Rogers & Peter Noble.

Claret body & blue arms, claret and blue collar & cuffs as worn by Bobby Moore & Geoff Hurst.

Old gold with black collar & cuffs, as worn by Derek Dougan.

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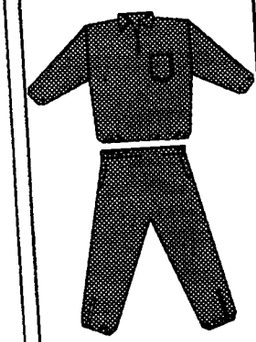

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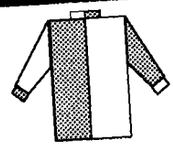
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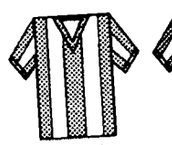
Green & white hoops, with shirt collar & button front.. As worn by Paddy Crerand.

Red body, white arms, shirt collar with button front. As worn by Derek Tapscott.

Blue with white arms and deep V-neck. As worn by Ted Phillips and Ray Crawford.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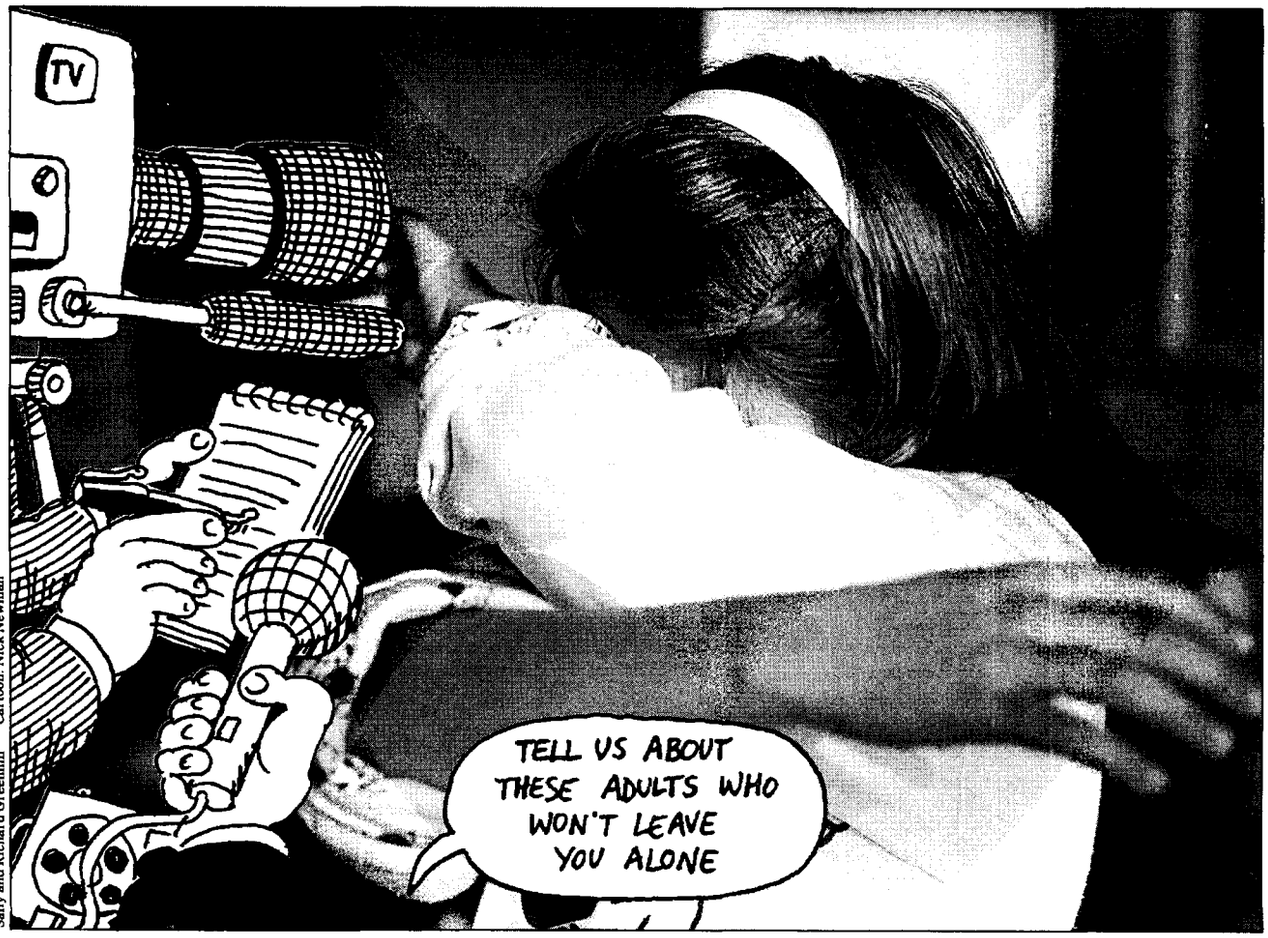
Beatrix Campbell argues children are seen and becoming heard

Citizens-To-Be



Sally and Richard Greenhill Cartoon: Nick Newman

Children are now in the political domain. But are they a new political subject? The answer is: not yet. A new political subject requires a public identity, accepted interests, respect, a hearing, and acknowledged rights.

Pindown exemplifies the absence of those rights. The Staffordshire case was about children being subject to strategies of control and punishment by a local authority regime and by its inspectors. Yet it was also about children's struggle for their subjectivity, for citizenship. The children's revolt in Staffordshire appealed to a new sensibility in the child-caring agencies and in the public domain in the 1980s. It was underwritten in the 1980 Children's Act, which specified that children's needs are paramount.

What we witnessed in Staffordshire was oppressed children, who in another context would have been designated the mad and the bad, claiming space in a public debate, and seeking and winning respect. And what, ironically, helped to establish that respect for the children and their revolt was the recent history of child protection politics and more particularly the scapegoating of social workers.

In the difficult passage from children as invisible to children as social subject, social workers have been on the frontline. In Staffordshire, they were the perpetrators and agents of the offence against children, though they were operating a package bought by their employers and endorsed by the government. The children's public parent, the local authority, was given the mandate to abuse them. But when it comes to uncovering abuse within the family by a private parent – as opposed to an institution – then social workers have been subject to immense criticism and abuse.

A constant refrain in child abuse cases – from Cleveland to Orkney – is the rights of the parents, as if they were synonymous with the rights of children.

The assertion of parental rights has been a central feature of every child abuse case. Parents deserve, like children, to be treated respectfully. But that is not the same as using parents' pain as an alibi, as the banner behind which those who deny the extent of the problem are mobilised. Yet in the explosive and tortuous politics of child protection over the last few years, those who would so deny are mainly on the defensive, despite appearances to the contrary.

What is the legacy of the most famous case of all, Cleveland? That parents do have rights. That social workers and doctors (and the police) cannot behave like the cavalry. But also that we now recognise something we did not recognise a decade ago: child sexual abuse within the family is widespread.

The politics of child protection is characterised by a contradiction: the rights of parents versus the rights of children. That contradiction is built into the new Children's Act. Yet the drift of history is clear. Children are now part of the public domain and public debate. This shift is linked to the spread of democracy, the arrival of new social subjects, a new plurality of voices in society, the decline of the authoritarian family, and children's critique of adults. We are in historical passage from seeing and not hearing children to perceiving them as citizens. Each stage of the process will be bitterly contested – as all great social changes always are – but the transition is nonetheless inevitable. ●

Beatrix Campbell

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For Britain the future is still a foreign country

Shock Of The New

Illustration: Simon Stern

Geoff Mulgan

This summer millions of British citizens will visit the continent of Europe. They will travel on faster trains, through more prosperous regions and better-planned cities, and lie on cleaner beaches than they can find at home.

All will see that by the standards of much of Europe, Britain is backward; backward not only in our low standards of education, our decaying public buildings and infrastructures, or in such residues of feudalism as the House of Lords and the position of an unknown and unelected Lord Mayor as London's only figurehead. Backwardness runs deeper than that. As any foreigner can see, these are all signs of a backward-looking culture that remains deeply embedded in an old class system and old institutions.

Ever since the end of the last century, decline has periodically returned as a political issue. Two factors are now forcing it back onto the agenda once again. One is the rapid approach of political and economic union. While 1992 exposes the deficiencies of British industry, other pressures towards integration highlight our deficiencies in everything from high-speed rail links to regional government. These in turn contribute to a sharp generational divide which can be seen not only in the far stronger pro-European sentiment of the under-40s, but also in the remarkable fact that most young people would now rather work for a Japanese than a British employer.

The second factor has been the rapid demise of Thatcherism. Only three years after a spate of speeches and articles promised that Britain was set to overtake the sclerotic Germans, Thatcher has joined the pantheon of failed modernisers, taking her place alongside Mosley and Joseph Chamberlain, Wilson and the young Tony Benn. For whatever may be said about the ideological impact of Thatcherism, nobody can dispute that it failed the test it set itself.

Recession has now brought the average growth rate since 1979 to 1.75%, lower not only than competitors, but also lower than under any government since the war. The result is that where Thatcherism looked dynamic and modern in the early 1980s, it now looks archaic. With its roots in the more parochial parts of English life, the small town and the suburb, and its faith in Victorian values (joined to a fear of the 1960s) it was always an unlikely philosophy for change. Now we can see that far from kicking Britain into the next century, Thatcherism's refusal to learn from the successful modernisation strategies of other countries, was more the last fling of the past.

Where the Thatcherites in their heyday invited the world to Britain to see the future, we're now more modestly learning from others. Some of the lessons are familiar. Alongside a competitive economy there has to be high and long-term investment, stable corporate governance, and well-funded education and infrastructure. Equally uncontroversial elsewhere (though radical in the British context) is the idea that no society is genuinely modern unless it provides opportunity for the mass of the population, unless it roots out old privileges, and unless its legal and political systems jettison obsolete traditions.

Modernity isn't just a matter of better electoral systems, car plants and high-speed trains. It is also about culture, about being at ease with change. This is one of the striking lessons of modern industry, where billions of dollars, yen and marks are spent to promote permanent innovation. Significantly, the spending doesn't just go on gadgets. It also goes on discovering new needs, on encouraging the active 'envisionment' of change, and on periodically returning managers and technologists to study so that the whole organisation becomes porous to new ways of thinking.

Governments are now beginning to do the same, reaching out beyond research into hardware and into the realm of social innovation. Japan's experiments are the most famous, captured in the grandiose technopolises, teletopias and modetopia, and the human frontiers programme. France under Mitterrand has spent vast sums on science cities like Sophia Antipolis, on the 'deconstruction park' and technological showpiece of La Villette in Paris, not to mention experiments in the organisation of parks, childcare or health. All are justified by the economic value of staying one step ahead on the future learning curve by acclimatising the population to the future.

The best experiments are populist and open, in stark contrast to the way in which the future is mapped out in Britain. They encourage people to try things out, since that's the only way of finding out what works. Though they appear to be concerned only with the leading edge, they also have a wider political significance in that they promote the ideal of a more porous society where the new spreads rapidly, where the young teach the old and where all knowledge and assumptions are open to re-appraisal. At their best they recognise Churchill's comment that the empires of the future are also empires of the mind, and add the insight that these are most soundly based when they feed off the minds of the many, not the few.

Britain has nothing to compare. It is scarcely possible to imagine the present government doing anything of the kind. If elsewhere it is the past that is a foreign country, in Britain it is the future which has become more alien. Our exercises in heritage are far more successful than our attempts at futurism – nobody is much inspired by London's Docklands, or for that matter Milton Keynes. Our most successful literature and cinema feeds off nostalgia, and our political culture's favourite literary form is the historical biography. Perhaps it all has something to do with the fact that Britain gave the world its two most frightening futures, in *1984* and *Brave New World*.

As Britain is dragged kicking and screaming into Europe, all of this may begin to change. Our forecasting institutions may branch out from their rather narrow concerns to offer a sense of the future as something that can be shaped. We may learn the lesson of the best organisations, that change is most successful and lasting when it is widely discussed and understood (a lesson the poll tax and NHS reforms should ram home). Above all, perhaps we may learn that patriotism doesn't have to be reactionary, and that for all the humanity of Constable and Elgar, William Morris, Philip Larkin and the slow slide, our survival as a coherent nation now depends more on challenging the ghosts of our past than on the pleasure we take in submitting to them.●

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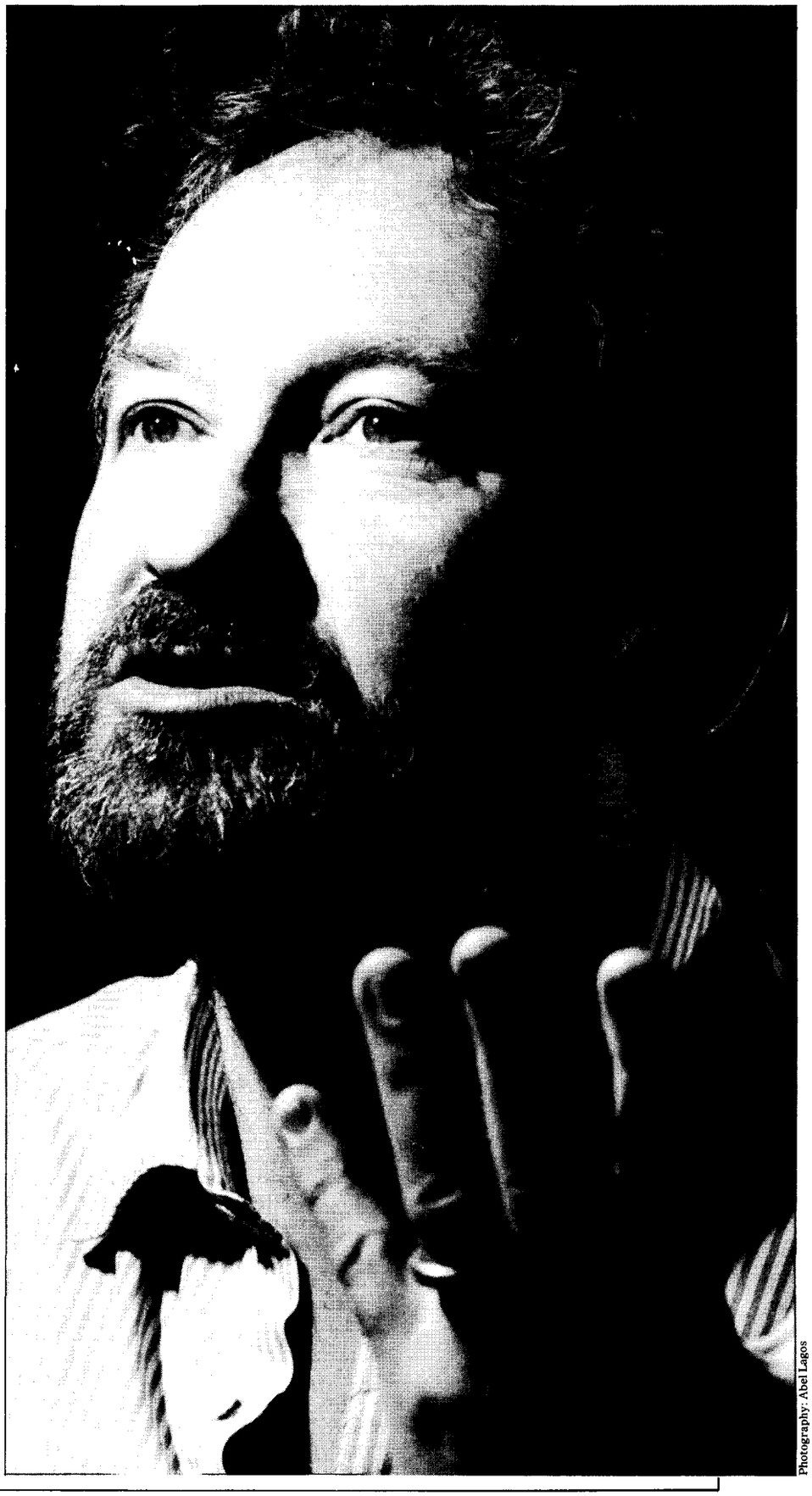
EYE TO EYE

Beatrix Campbell on a novel approach to history

1789 And All That

Simon Schama is professor of history at Harvard University



Photography: Abel Lagos

You say that you don't want to write a history about Jews. I can imagine that it might cause you pain, but is that sufficient explanation?

It's a matter of distress to my mother that I don't write more about Jewish history. It may be that I haven't sorted out sufficiently in my own life how much of it is Jewish or coloured by Judaism. I was brought up a very orthodox Jew. I stopped being orthodox but I continued, typically among my sort of generation, to eat only kosher food long after I stopped believing in god.

I obviously find it easier to is write histories of cultures which aren't mine. The degree to which I can involve myself seems less tangled. It may just have been the experience of writing the Rothschild book (*Two Rothschilds And The Land Of Israel*). I couldn't work out my relationship with this sort of Jewish past. What I did know was that I felt I was pulling punches.

Tell us what you feel about your audacious restoration of the narrative as a historical form, given that everyone has got a stake in everything. What is the meaning of your insistence on that form?

It's not an exclusive insistence at all, and I have no complaint about the intellectual dignity of analytical history.

No, but it's the history you do...

There are historians who want to keep company with the past. What draws them to the past is their sense of witness of things that happen before their own life. I have always been drawn by a sort of encounter with others both in time and in space. My temperament is that of the tomb wanderer and storyteller, rather than a scientific explainer.

The issue which makes the narrative form so important to me is the issue of cultural memory. It may be because I live in a country which is so addicted to the contemporary. There is a phrase in Horace where he says that cultures which have lost themselves reduce themselves to infantilism.

I do see myself in the company of people who want to go beyond the usual pieties of academic journals. At the American Historical Association Convention there are 5000 historians, all of whom are only interested in scratching each other's footnotes in the pecking order of the profession. I find that deeply dispiriting.

The virtuosity of your work is, I imagine, a

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tentious phrase. The peculiarity of historical writing is that we have a relationship with those dead people. There are things about them which are inescapably remote, the way they feel toothache or the way they feel about natural law. But there are some ways in which we are not remote, their children. This tantalising measuring of the degree of relationship draws people.

The criticisms of *Citizens* which I really minded were the ones which said: 'Because this is a story, there is no argument'. Actually, marxist historians were much more generous than those who thought I'd betrayed liberalism. They were terribly generous about the story-telling issue, about the attempted energy, while arguing like mad about what I was saying about the revolution.

What do you feel now about the book's argument, about blood and death and revolutionary terror, given that it was, inescapably, an intervention in a contemporary politics?

When I started writing the book I didn't know I was going to be so engaged by the problem of the punishments of revolution. The argument that I thought was going to be controversial was that the *ancien régime* was misunderstood.

What I didn't realise was going to worry me so much was the sense in which the rhetoric was not only overwhelming but the back was turned on the possibility of pluralist politics so early.

The violence that was expended on taking the Bastille seems to me wholly legitimate. After all, the alternative was a royalist military *coup d'état*. What really bothered me was the way in which demonstrative violence took over.

Gradually people figured out how to engineer demonstrations of punishment. That concerned me more deeply than I expected. I used the phrase 'violence was the revolution itself', which I now regret. But I don't regret what I had to say about the September massacres, about what happened the day the Tuileries were taken in 1792, the way I came to feel about the tragic indispensability of punishment.

One can see similar problems in central Europe as it is arriving back in pluralist politics. How do you restore an original sense of political ideology being politically liberating rather than politically captivating? What's happening in a lot of eastern Europe is that they're reshaping themselves like the 1920s and 30s: the peasant parties, the ethnic parties, religious parties, antisemitic parties. I saw that as something that was happening as the book came out.

What is important in your narrative is your argument about public speech and the public domain, and the space in which a public begins to see and hear itself. The blood and guts stuff can be shiveringly significant. I'm just wondering about what you now feel about your unconscious imperatives. Your sense of the awfulness of the blood and guts left you open to criticism about being soft on the monarchy and the old order.

I am slightly wistful. If I had to do it again I would keep everything I had. But I think it ought to have been balanced out more in a way by a sense of the bleakness of the alternatives for ordinary people at the time.

Which isn't that well developed, is it?

It starts out looking as though it's going to be but no, it isn't. I was really upset, though, with being thought to be monstrously more conservative than I am. I'm some sort of centre leftist. I'm not sure what sort, but I am! I think it's better if we face that issue of the violence and the blood and go on from there.

Your Dutch book, *The Embarrassment Of Riches*, has a completely different atmosphere. Here is the 'acceptable face of capitalism', the bourgeoisie that pulled it off.

The one chapter that's overwhelmingly missing from that book is the unbelievably brutal history of the Dutch Empire, which, one day, I wouldn't mind writing about. Holland has always seemed possibly slightly boring but immensely cosy to me. The Dutch part of what I offer is possibly a little bit too overidealised, the sense of the pleasures of ordinariness. But it's not a narrative, it's a promenade.

What do you take from more radical cultural historians and what they've brought to the way in which history is thought about and written?

An enormous amount.

Any in particular?

Depends who we're talking about. Natalie Davis, for example – it was an absolute bolt of lightning that somebody could see how important the symbolic life could be as a living force, a social energy. EP Thompson's *The Making Of The English Working Class* made a huge impression.

What has feminist history done for history?

It created an entire world which wasn't there; it's almost impossible to overestimate its achievements.

What does it do for your kind of history?

I'm very conscious that it's made me more educated, particularly when looking at paintings; it's made me sensitive to the sort of extraordinary inscriptions. For example the images of one of Louis XV's briefly-kept mistress. I was made much more conscious that the painting was property and it depicted the person in it as absolute property, disposable property, sexual erotic convenience, basically.

Tell us in a more general way. How do you as a historian and someone who is interested in and would want to write fiction, engage with the problem of writing history for and about those for whom there has been an encouragement to forget. Slaves, for example?

About people for whom there are absolutely no records, you can't do it. But you can if you think about songs, for example, which weren't thought of as historical evidence. Professors in white universities decided what was historical evidence.

I want to talk now about fiction. Do you want to give up histories?

No. My next book is going to be very highbrow, footnotes and everything. I don't want to give up history at all and I don't think it should be given up on.

Why play with fiction in the way that you have with *Dead Certainties*? Why not just move right into fiction?

I would like to do that at some point. Not that I would henceforth declare myself to be a novelist. But I would like to see if it was possible to write fiction and still remain a historian and tackle works which are more properly historical. *Dead Certainties* was intended to pose certain questions about invention and documentation. One argument about this book taking on some elements of fiction is that I have been so impressed with a number of books which have taken on the issue of remembering and forgetting and the relationship between here and now.

What's history for?

It's for two things. Only one of which I'm probably going to do in my life. It's for witness, story-telling, and resurrection. And it is for argument and analysis.

History is to rescue us from the eccentricity of our own sense that 'the contemporary is all that matters'.●

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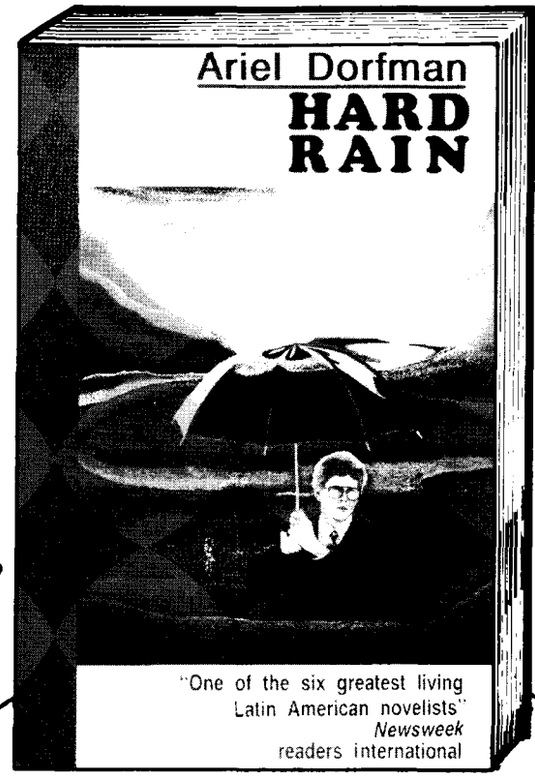

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Charters in the air

Citizen Major

Illustration: Simon Stern

Sarah Benton

For a time, Major took his charter very seriously. The absurdity of a citizens' charter, written in secret by a government department and launched by a prime minister, escaped him. As his predecessor had virtually abolished citizens, we probably are not yet very real to him either. Even so, he should have been told that a citizens' charter should not be something the citizens first find out about in the newspapers.

Of course, the prime minister would have a point in arguing that he had to get on with it as we have been slow in coming up with the sort of charter that he thinks is right for us. But he could at least have invited citizens' suggestions; attached to our census forms, perhaps, we might have had a multi-choice questionnaire on our civic rights (keeping pit bull terriers, getting fat, getting stoned). But these are not the sort of rights that the government has in mind.

John 'call-me-classless' Major was warned off a charter precisely because it suggested civic rights that could be codified and enforced. They raise popular expectations, have no natural limits, are imbued with potent moral meanings, and, as Graham Mather of the Institute for Economic Affairs argues, are 'unpriced'. Just imagine what a general, priceless *right* to a decent home would mean. This is why the Right prefers to talk of contracts, through which limited services can be organised, with no moral or political overtones. Such contracts deal with costs and delivery. They do not shift power, or hope, around.

In fact, charters, and their associated social contract, have been historically one of the great levers for shifting power, and creating new political societies. The word resonates with great moments of popular democracy. Through charters people have asserted their citizenship and attempted to define what relationship they expect to have with government. They keep the government, not the state as such, under popular control.

So why have Conservatives played around with such a tricky notion? Because, at a time when charters are in the air, Major hoped he could harness the idea to establish his moral leadership of popular Conservatism. The eclipse of socialism has dramatically increased the need for leaders to define their distinct political strategies. The absence of socialism has destroyed the dialectic of political life. It has created a new dynamic which demands that political leaders have a Big Idea, a 'vision', and do indeed propose a new political society. Conservatism in the heyday of socialism could merely function as the counter to socialism. It didn't have to grub around for big political ideas; indeed, it made a virtue out of having neither politics nor ideas.

Now, not only does the Conservative Party have to take some responsibility for articulating political ideals, but, in this post-party age, its *leader* is expected to produce something called 'Majorism'. He cannot be the great helmsman for traditional Conservatism, the simple steward of Disraeli's legacy. Yet, whether he wants to or not, Major must inherit the new relationship of people, state and government which Thatcher inaugurated, because it is not in his power to change it.

In an unspoken echo of Thatcherism, Major's notion of citizens is that we exist to keep the state in check. Like Thatcher, he seems to be saying that governments do not have the power to direct and check the day-to-day workings of the state. This was also, let us not forget, one of the first aims of the poll tax; if the government could not simply abolish the public sector and local state, it would force the citizens to control them. A people's charter might be used by citizens to shape the government to fit their aims. A Conservative citizens' charter – that is, one which does not spell out our 'big rights' – suggests the government can shape the citizens to fit its aim of controlling the state.

This does not explain why charter and contract are the buzz words of the 1990s. They are everywhere, a thread running from the EC's Social Charter, through York city councils citizen charter, from Charter 88 to the promise of a citizen's charter from the Liberal Democrats in their May 1991 action programme, to *The Independent* newspaper's proposals for education reform called a charter for schools. These uses of the word charter are echoes of precisely the desire to establish a new relationship between citizen and state.

They are in the air for the simple reason that the old, unwritten contract of social democracy had cracked up. That left hanging the suspicion, powerful if unspoken, that perhaps people felt under no obligation to behave lawfully or responsibly when government had abandoned them. For a decade, we have had a government which asserted its escape from the social contract: the government did not control the state, the government had no obligation towards the people at all. It claimed its mission was to throw us on our own resources: you feed yourselves, clothe yourselves, house yourselves and stuff as much money into your pockets as you can get away with.

So what, dear government, is your job? It seemed for a time, as people hung their heads and wrung their hands over a mean and selfish society, where people turned up the television to drown out the sound of brutality, that the state – our state – had condensed into the police force. Once the government had shed its obligations, it declared that civic society, its contractual partner, simply did not exist. No nanny state, no society, no social contract.

A Conservative citizens' charter would be a retreat from that abyss to which Thatcher led her party. However trite and insignificant the rights Major had in mind, his citizens' charter did at least restore political society in Conservative minds.

The current reinvention of citizenship and its companion charterism is a stepping stone across the break-up of the old social democracy. Not only has the familiar relationship of civil society, state and government disintegrated, so too has the familiar distinction between public and private. We live in a world where nation states cannot control capitalist companies but in which capitalist companies may deliver more 'public goods' (equal opportunities, clean-air practices) than any agency can. And we live in a world where the state may more actively intervene in family life than it does in employment. What is sad about Major's citizens' charter is that it's a spoiler for better ones to come.●

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Sweet Charity

Michael H Taylor is director of Christian Aid

Sarah Benton (*Marxism Today*, June) describes progress in a barbarous century. In her version, the poor and oppressed make some headway, and she attributes this to three interrelated causes: international support, free-market capitalism and 20th-century technology. Her thesis, however, is debateable, and her apparent embrace of the laws of supply and demand is worrying.

Opportunities in the market place are notoriously unequal. Not all demands are heard, let alone met. The great new fact of our time is not the willingness of the West to receive refugees from the East – what is new is their freedom to leave. Not all are free, though, and not all are welcome when they come. 'Fortress Europe' can be remarkably selective. It has done little over the years for the people of Cambodia, isolated by the West and denied international aid.

When it comes to supply, many in the Third World find the interventions of the West as much of a hindrance as a help. If capitalism, as Benton suggests, reminds us of our responsibility for poverty, its iron laws have often proceeded to exacerbate rather than remove it. Proposals for so-called free trade can undermine sustainable agriculture and food production. Structural adjustment programmes aimed at restoring poorer countries to credibility within an unsatisfactory world economic system often add to the burdens of the poor. Governments cannot afford to subsidise food prices or provide basic health and educational services because international debts have to be paid.

But the imagery of supply and demand and the free market is most unsatisfactory, on the international scene and the home front, when regarded as an adequate mechanism for meeting human need. It is useful, but it is not enough, especially where the cries of the needy are not heard, or are not found to be especially appealing, or where there is little profit in meeting them – and here I share Benton's worry about a Third World denuded of political structures by an interventionist First World.

Contrary to the opinions of commentators, charities like Christian Aid are not worried by 'compassion fatigue'. There is no sign of it. Instead, they are worried about a well-intentioned sentimentality that responds generously to sudden disasters, but is less serious about addressing the causes of poverty. Here a 'free-for-all' won't do. Communism may be dead, but our community with one another lives on.

Some groups and regions will always lose out. At home we are prepared to take account of that through regional grants and support systems paid for out of our taxes, not as a matter of charity, but of common responsibility. The same must apply on the international scene. If there is to be a new world order, it must, at the very least, be a 'mixed economy' where 'international support' comes in the form of trade agreements and adjustment policies and debt relief and rescheduling which have a 'bias to the poor', building up their own capacity to do what in the end they do best, and giving them the chance to make headway – which they are as eager to take as the rest of us.●

Ann Clwyd MP is shadow minister for overseas development and co-operation

Even George Bush had to drop his fishing rod in a hurry when pictures of dying Kurds hit the television screens night after night. Sarah Benton's point (*Marxism Today*, June) that international public opinion is a new and potent force to be reckoned with is correct. What political leader can afford to ignore public reaction to starving Kurds or babies in Africa?

As to Benton's argument that the public's compassion is unlikely to dry up, it is true that people do respond instantly to television reports of death and disaster. My office, for example, was inundated with letters and phone calls. Many correspondents wanted to be flown out instantly to help the Kurds. However, in emergencies, negative images of helpless people inevitably prevail. The public rarely see the positive work that the same people are doing to help themselves.

The greatest problem is sustaining that urge to assist. What is desperately needed to nurture this new global watchdog of public opinion is, first of all, a greater emphasis on development education. People starve because they are poor, and poverty is the result of a complex web of political, economic and social factors – how much money their government has to spend on paying its debts, what prices dealers in New York pay for their coffee or their sugar, who owns the land locally, and what the multinationals do in their country.

Government aid will not fire people's enthusiasm. It is necessary for them to be able to offer their skills and commitment through non-governmental organisations. Creative examples of what can be done already exist, though they are the exception rather than the rule. Oxford is twinned with Leon, a university town in Nicaragua, and the Local Government Information Bureau advises many other local authorities involved in twinning. But in the US, President Kennedy set up a 'partnership of the Americas', linking nearly every state with regions of Latin America: teachers, vets, dance groups, students and patients needing treatment go North and South. And it's not only local authorities which can be twinned: firms, trade unions, schools or colleges, hospitals or health authorities, traffic policy or sewage departments can make such links.

For example, the Lusaka highways department could have a long term relationship with the city engineers department of a British city. At present it has two British city traffic engineers under the British aid programme, who each serve for two years, cut off from their profession at home, and then leave just when they have become established. Instead, Zambians could come for practical training to a city where they have established links, and British engineers could go to Zambia for varying periods of time, but with a job to come back to, and continual professional back-up from home.

At the moment, public opinion is effective in short bursts, but makes little impact in the long term. The debt crisis has been a painful fact of life for developing countries for nine years. It is the biggest obstacle to development, and yet there is very little will to tackle it. Only when the public confront politicians with their outrage over the misery in which millions of people in the developing world live, will they be forced to make it a priority for national action.●

Scots Free

The one strong claim that pro-nationalists can make, and David Marquand (*MT* May) made most tellingly, is that Westminster government is antiquated and inadequate. Yes, our constitution is an improvised ragbag, and yes, our political leaders seem to have a deep and mysterious faith in the power of the back-of-the-envelope solution. However, the prospect of lots of mini-Westminsters springing up all over Britain, sending out pseudo-pods of political sovereignty, makes little sense. Equally, the prospect of politics in the even-smaller pool of a backwater Scottish state is appalling.

Moreover, the myth that the membership of the European supra-state can justify the creation of a Scottish mini-state is one that needs to be attacked. How can we possibly believe that a divided Britain will have a stronger voice in Europe than a united one? Would we really be better off as a semi-independent state?

Some might argue that there is a case to be made about the strength of an independent Scottish economy. Such arguments are unrealistic – an independent Scotland would be a minnow in a sea of strong and hungry sharks. If the British economy is unhealthily open to outside dominance, the idea of a Scottish one is little more than a joke.

So what remains? A set of romantic notions of 'difference' from our English neighbours and the idea that somehow self-determination is 'progressive' because it can lead to a socialist Scotland. More myths.

I for one do not speak Gaelic and although my family have a highland background the reality is that I have more in common with a city-dweller in Manchester or Birmingham, or for that matter Amsterdam or Berlin, than I have with a crofter in Lewis.

What, then, is the solution to Britain's economic disintegration, political ineptitude and accelerating slide into Third-World status? None other than the less glamorous and more realistic one of adapting to European systems of government and hoping like hell that the Germans will take over our economy, because it looks like our last, best hope.●

James M Carmichael, National Identities Research Unit, Glasgow Polytechnic

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A Game Of Monopoly

In your *Manifesto For The Public Sector* (*MT* May), you argue that Oftel and Ofgas 'have proved relatively successful in monitoring private sector monopolies', and that they enable dissatisfied customers 'to appeal to someone other than the politicians or professionals responsible for a service'. In fact, they enable politicians to avoid responsibility for their decisions. The 'independent' watchdogs are appointed by politicians, work within government guidelines, and all major policy decisions are still made by ministers; but any attempt to question the implementation of these policies is sidestepped by the ministers concerned.

Thus the radical restructuring of entire public-service industries has been removed from democratic control. Unelected placemen, handpicked for their political orthodoxy, decide what is in the public interest. There is no evidence that Oftel, for instance, has performed better than the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) would have done. Most Oftel staff are seconded from, and still work closely with, the DTI. The difference is the absence of ministerial answerability for Oftel's actions.

Of course we need watchdog bodies for all monopolies. But such watchdogs should neither make nor implement policy – they should scrutinise policy-making and implementation. At present, Oftel and Ofgas combine all three roles, which leads to a conflict of interest and to a lack of accountability.●

Dermod Quirke, Halifax

Eunuch Power

Suzanne Moore (*MT* June) wonders what use there would ever be for human sterile males. The Byzantines found them amazingly useful. Eunuchs rose to great positions of state because their inability to produce heirs made them unthreatening to ruling dynasties. A court eunuch could even take precedence over a 'complete' male courtier; families had sons neutered for their advancement. One of Justinian's two most brilliant generals was the eunuch Narses, who only became a military man in his 60s and was still successfully commanding armies for Constantinople at the age of 91.●

Brian Miller, Bristol

Fair Shares

'Do you own shares?' your Back Page interviewees are probingly asked. 'No', they (smugly?) reply. Does none of them belong to a pension scheme? What's the difference? And what's the point of the question?●

Julian Peach, London

Serial Thrillers

Following on from Suzanne Moore's column (*MT* May) on the recent spate of serial-killer films and books, it is interesting to note that only when fictional killers like Hannibal Lecter (*Silence Of The Lambs*) and Patrick Bateman (*American Psycho*) are enticingly intelligent and cultured do the highbrow literophiles in our midst begin to listen. If this new trend is anything to go by, the serial killers of the present will unfortunately become the symbols, perhaps even the visionaries, of the irrational age of unreason which is our inescapable post-fordist future.

It's all horrifyingly attractive. As Richard Ramirez, the Los Angeles Nightstalker, reputedly said at his trial, 'I am beyond your experience'. Those little voices inside my mind that tell me to go out and suffocate culture vultures to death by shoving a large stick of Blackpool rock down their throats have started talking to me again.●

Camilla Fanshawe, Surrey

Pearls And Swine

There's nothing to stop right-wing politics professors like Kenneth Minogue from making fools of themselves on the letters pages of *Marxism Today* (April). But they should have some respect for history.

Minogue says that Edmund Burke was writing at a time when the government 'did very little interfering in society'. But under the government of Pitt the Younger, democratic political organisations, such as the London Corresponding Society, were harassed and eventually banned, the laws of seditious libel were used to shackle the press and the Combination Acts were introduced to outlaw trade unionism.

As for his reference to Burke's 'greatest of all conservative arguments', Minogue presumably means Burke's *Reflections On The Revolution In France*, a brilliantly-written but bitter and hate-filled polemic against the very idea of democracy. In it Burke refers to the mass of the people as the 'swinish multitude', an attitude apparently shared by Minogue and other conservative ideologues of today.●

Paul Fauvet, Mozambique

Penile Dementia

Allan Massie's article (*MT* April) purported to discuss the 'Euro-novel'; but did no such thing. Instead, it mentioned about 40 male novelists and only two female ones.

Are women not Europeans? Do women not write 'European' novels? Can you only write novels if you have a penis? Does having a penis mean you can only appreciate the work of writers who have penises too? Were the two women writers mentioned (Colette and Muriel Spark) the exceptions who prove the rule?

Why wasn't Massie asked either to rewrite his article, and include a survey of women's work, or to retitle it to make it clear that it was about men's novels? Are you trying to get rid of your women readers?●

Michèle Roberts, London

Cartoon: Nick Newman

Changing Gere

Perhaps Frances Barber (*MT* June) doesn't realise that Richard Gere is a practising Buddhist. I don't think she's upped her chances of getting him into bed with the revelation that she once worked in a Chuckie Chicken factory. Very bad karma.●

Lola Montes, Walthamstow

Playing God

In her letter, Mairn Scott (*MT* June) attempts to finesse important questions about science and society. However, to finesse successfully needs self-effacement, and her arrogance prevents this; her phrase, 'We [scientists] alone can subsume science within our cultural lives', is telling.

The big questions in science and society revolve around the manifest failure of science and scientists to subsume science within any wider context. They might be able to, but they don't. We scientists still invest our every pronouncement with jargon and remain addicted to the self-image of the white-coated, even-handed dispenser of absolute knowledge.

The fact remains that scientific research, when seen holistically as a process, rather than atomistically as a series of tested hypotheses, is shaped by the social world as much as the material. Susan Watt's article (*MT* June) highlighted this admirably. Gene-splicing is big business, and the essential *sexiness* of it, the essence that persuades young people to follow the pillar of smoke through the desert of studies to the far-from-verdant groves of academe, is nothing if not the chance to cast themselves as God in their very own Cecil B DeMille bedroom production.●

Kirsty Gilheaney, Mary Culter

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new left review

NLR 186

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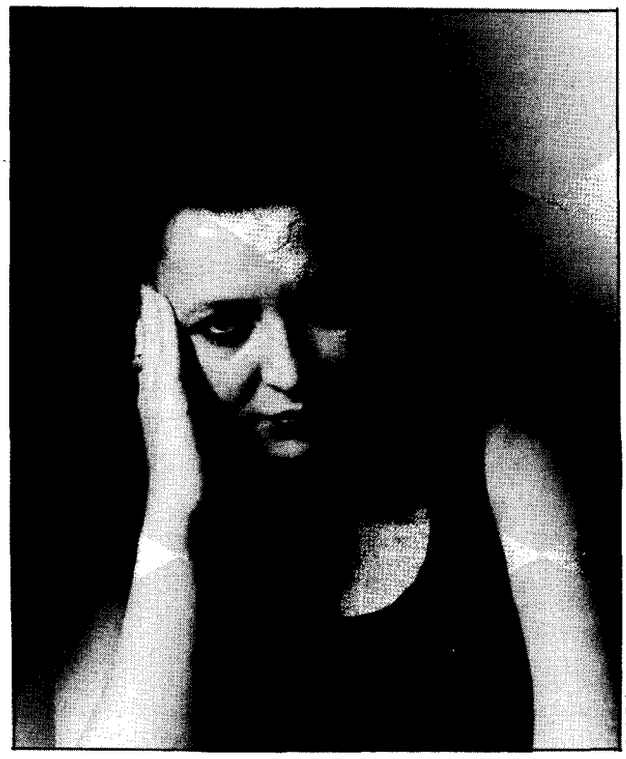

Josh Pulman

Getting into bed with Madonna

Material Girl

Of the holy trinity of Material Girls that dominated the 80s, only one is successfully negotiating the 90s. Margaret Thatcher has been reduced to grumbling on the back benches – the House of Commons is where you go when you've got nothing better to do – and Joan Collins to 'acting' for the BBC. *Dynasty* has finally been laid to rest and Alexis Colby has gone to the great bubble-bath in the sky. Yet Madonna just goes from strength to strength.

She was the main attraction at Cannes, where her documentary *In Bed With Madonna* was premiered. She has been on the cover of *Vanity Fair*, *The Face*, and *Q*. For some time she has been taught on women's studies courses and, as if anyone apart from himself cares any more, Michael 'Get Into The Groove' Ignatieff pronounced from the great height of his *Observer* column that she was not a proper 'artist'. Instead, he prefers dead Marilyn. After all, there's nothing like dying to bring out divinity in a woman.

Ms Ciccone, on the other hand, is very much alive. More than a Lucky Star has made one of the most famous women in the world. So why do so many on the Left feel decidedly dodgy about getting into bed with her, despite her eloquent espousal of all the right causes – women's and gay issues, outspoken support for Aids research, and her continuing insistence on freedom of speech? Shouldn't we be glad to have her on our side?

This unease about her use of sexuality as a power base surfaced again recently in a piece by Ros Coward. Understanding the power of sex or the sexiness of power simply may not be good enough – ultimately it doesn't give women real freedom or real power. But if 80m dollars doesn't give you real power I don't know what does.

Is she just too hot to handle? On her last tour, the press fell over themselves to tell us that, even kitted out in Gaultier corsets, she was not sexy enough, as though Madonna's aim in life was to titillate a bunch of hyperventilating menopausal males. Is it only the little girls who understand, who don't have a problem with simulated masturbation? Or indeed, the real thing? You can't feign an interest in popular culture and then hold back when something gets this popular. Inevitably, any analysis never comes near articulating the sheer physical joy that her performance exudes.

But many also miss her cleverness. She is continually described as *smart*. Not clever, not intellectual, not thoughtful, but smart. As in sussed, sassy, streetwise – a pragmatic kind of intelligence that is continually devalued by those who prefer their feminism to remain rather abstract. Her acute selfconsciousness about image, our collective use of star images, and indeed her own constant changes of appearance, gives her career a remarkable consistency.

Sometimes this can be plain embarrassing. The bits in the film where we are supposed to be seeing 'the real Madonna' – bleaching her hair and bitching on the phone – are, like many of her onstage routines, just *too* obvious, too over the top. Too much honesty flips over easily into its reverse. Can we trust anything she shows us? We see Madonna crying at her mother's grave, fellating a bottle, bawling out her tour manager.

We come away knowing nothing. The myth is left intact. Onstage it is the real Madonna, off it a pale imitation of a star – charming, infantile, obsessive. Madonna knows her place, and it is at the end of a long line of female icons from Garbo to Monroe who, unlike her, were not in control of their own images, let alone their own lives. This skill amply demonstrates her shrewd manipulation of the history of the cinema.

Such techniques of irony and media literacy, though prized in the hands of men, become distinctly troubling in the hands of women – and when turned on to the question of femininity itself, transgressive. The tabloids may have shrieked that she looked like a man in drag, because she so clearly revels in the shiny surfaces of femininity, that what is reflected back is their very artifice. This process, known psychoanalytically as the masquerade, is one of which she is a mistress. It can be used by powerful women as a way of disguising their threat. But the threat remains – to put on femininity with a vengeance suggests the power of taking it off.

Which is what makes the promise of the movie – 'Madonna like you've never seen her before' – even more of a come-on. It feeds directly into the very cultural preoccupations which she has so successfully exploited – the dichotomy between image and reality. We want our stars both to be out of the ordinary and yet somehow representative of the ordinary. What makes Madonna ordinary is her upfront aspiration to be somebody, to be important. What makes her extraordinary is that she has done it. Her naked ambition makes us even more uncomfortable than her naked body. Women may know what they want, but they are still not supposed to show what they want.

Somewhere along the line, we still like to think that stars are born, not made. Yet many of our biggest stars, like Schwarzenegger, have completely reconstructed themselves. There is nothing natural about this, and Schwarzenegger's assimilation into the American Dream is as bizarre as his accent.

There are no more secrets. Politics too is now openly discussed in terms of appearances and sound-bites. Long gone are the times when exposing such conscious tampering with image would have blown apart credibility. Today it is an index of success. Nobody understands this better than Madonna. Whether she is slobbing about in her dressing gown or discussing her art, she reveals very little of herself, but a hell of a lot about the mechanisms of stardom, and that peculiar state of permanent adolescence which our culture calls 'fame'.●

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The centre of the political storm is now the NHS. **Chris Ham** picks his way through the debate and argues that Labour must not defend the status quo

Select

If It Isn't Hurting It Isn't Working

At first sight, recent events in the NHS lend strong support to the Government's critics. Warnings that the introduction of market principles would lead to disruption and instability appear to have been accurate. The announcement of job losses at the Guy's and Bradford trusts, the threat posed to medical schools, and the inequities that have emerged through the operation of the GP fund holding scheme have dominated newspaper headlines and stim-ulated intense political and public debate. With the NHS emerging as the key issue in the Monmouth by-election, the two major parties are contending for the moral high ground in the position they take on the future of health services.

Yet before concluding that the debate is over and that the NHS reforms will go the same way as the poll tax, it is worth taking a closer look at what is really happening. There are more than two sides to the argument, and some of the subtleties and nuances of the debate have been obscured in the confrontation between the government and its critics. Robin Cook and his colleagues are understandably keen to make as much capital as possible out of public concern about the reforms but in reality they would be faced with many of the same challenges if Labour were returned to office. The NHS changes are not an aberration borne out of the dying days of Thatcherism, and the opportunity to tackle long standing weaknesses in service delivery should not be lost.

In view of this, the opposition is entering dangerous territory in appearing to align itself so closely with professional interests opposed to the reforms. Given the legacy of Thatcherism, the public may not be persuaded that the NHS is safe in the Tories' hands, but there is little in the changes which runs counter to the founding principles of the NHS. If Labour is really committed to the provision of high quality public services, then a more discriminating response to the reforms is needed. To be sure, the government's strategy carries a number of risks and includes changes which Labour should reverse, but its essential thrust contains much of value.

At the heart of the reforms is the separation of responsibility for purchasing and providing health services. In future, health authorities and GPs who choose to become fund holders will purchase services for patients. The provision of hospital care will increasingly come under the control of NHS trusts.

57 trusts were established on April 1. Others are expected to follow suit as hospitals and services that are managed directly by health authorities choose to become self governing. The purchasers of services (health authorities and GP fund holders) will negotiate contracts with providers (NHS trusts and directly managed hospitals) setting out the cost, quality and quantity of care to be provided. Under these arrangements, pro-

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viders will compete for contracts as money follows patients. This is intended to create stronger incentives for efficiency and to make services more responsive to patients.

In seeking to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the reforms, the position of trusts provides an essential starting point. It is, however, the interplay between NHS trusts and health authorities which will determine how the reforms work in practice. The role of health authorities as purchasers has been relatively neglected so far, and yet it is crucial both to a proper understanding of what the changes involve and how they might be used by Labour to pursue its objectives. In addition, it is also necessary to examine the position in London, where the reforms will have a major impact, and the operation of the GP fund holding scheme, which threatens to undermine many of the changes that are taking place.

Despite Labour's claim, self-governing trusts remain within the NHS. They differ from directly managed hospitals and services in that they are governed by their own boards and have somewhat greater freedoms in respect of personnel, finance and the use of their assets. In essence, trusts are similar to the boards of governors which Nye Bevan set up to run teaching hospitals between 1948 and 1974. They are directly accountable to the secretary of state and are required to publish an annual report and accounts.

The job losses at Guy's and Bradford are in part to do with the establishment of trusts but more importantly they result from the operation of the market. The introduction of competition has forced managers at these hospitals to cut their costs in line with the contracts they have negotiated with purchasers. Other hospitals which remain directly managed by health authorities are faced with a similar situation, and some (for example, the Charing Cross and Westminster hospitals) have already been forced to take action to reduce their expenditure.

The importance of self-governing status is that it requires trusts to examine critically the work they do and to concentrate on those services likely to attract contracts from purchasers. At Guy's an exercise is under way to create an investment fund of £6m to enable some services to be strengthened while others are pared back or eliminated entirely. Trust hospitals can no longer rely on receiving extra funds from health authorities to make up for overspending. As a consequence, they have to make sure that their services are well managed and meet the requirements of purchasers.

If it is accepted that NHS trusts should help to ensure that public resources are well managed, then critics have misdirected their attacks against the government. William Waldegrave's main mistake has been to seriously misjudge the pace of change by pushing ahead too quickly and by allowing hospitals whose finances were not in good shape to become trusts (Guy's, for example, inherited a deficit of almost £7m). The consequence is that an innovation which has much to commend it has been undermined. With two of the flagships of the trust movement forced to take unpopular decisions at such an early stage, it is not surprising that public confidence in the Government's handling of the NHS has reached a low ebb.

If the stimulus to use public resources efficiently is one of the benefits of trust status, then the opportunity it creates for health authorities to take on an independent purchasing role is another. Arguably, the establishment of health authorities as purchasers is the most radical and positive aspect of the reforms. It would be much more difficult to develop a clear and distinctive purchasing function if hospitals remained directly managed by health authorities.

The reason for this is simple. The NHS, in common with many other public services, has long been dominated by providers. The views of hospital doctors and managers have played a key part in shaping priorities and determining the direction in which services should develop. Patients and the public have found it difficult to influence the policy-making process and providers have not always been responsive to their needs and demands.

By setting up health authorities as purchasers of care at arm's length from hospitals, the reforms create the opportunity of developing a countervailing force to provider dominance. As their role develops, health authorities should be able to use their purchasing power to hold hospital doctors and managers accountable and to bring about improvements in the quality of care. The medical profession has clearly perceived the challenge to professional and provider autonomy and this is one of the reasons why the BMA is protesting so loudly about the reforms.

The establishment of health authorities as purchasers will help to ensure that trusts do not neglect their responsibility to offer services to people who live in their areas. Most of the care provided in trusts will be paid for by NHS funds and the services they deliver must therefore reflect the purchasing priorities of health authorities. It will be the responsibility of health authorities to decide what services to buy based on an assessment of the population's need for health care. This may well involve significant changes in the services available in some trusts.

Yet if the current emphasis within the NHS really does reflect provider preferences rather than the population's needs, then changes are both inevitable and desirable. Freed from provider capture, health authorities will be able to allocate their budgets in a way which better reflects the needs and demands of patients and the public. As events at Guy's and Bradford have demonstrated, the consequence may well be job losses.

Cutbacks in employment are clearly painful for staff but they should not necessarily be equated with a worse service for patients. Developments in health care technology are making it possible to provide additional services with fewer staff, and reductions in the number of people working in the NHS would have occurred even in the absence of the reforms. The litmus test is whether purchasers use their resources to improve the quality of care and achieve better health outcomes. To be sure, these are inherently difficult to measure but it would be wrong to assume that staffing reductions always have an adverse effect on patients.

The same logic applies in considering the position of London's health services. London is the crucible of the reforms for it is in the capital that there is greatest scope for competition. Hospitals are finding themselves under increasing pressure as health authorities look critically at where they can achieve best value for their residents and major changes in service provision are certain to occur.

The concern expressed at the impact of the reforms on London needs to be treated with caution. For historical reasons London has always been overprovided with hospitals and considerably more money has been spent on health services per person in the Thames regions than in the rest of the country. On the grounds of equity, some of the resources allocated to London should be channelled to other parts of the country.

This is now happening, as health authorities are funded as purchasers of services for their residents. This method of allocating resources has made a big difference to the amount of money available to health authorities in some parts of the country. Inner city health authorities on the whole receive less money because of their declining populations while health authorities in the shire counties in general receive additional resources. Money is also moving from London and the south east to regions such as Wessex and East Anglia.

By robbing Peter to pay Paul, it should be possible to ensure that services are provided more accessibly to patients and where they are most needed. The result will almost certainly be a reduction in the number of hospitals in London. It is difficult to argue against this on the basis of fair shares for all, although the rationalisation of services in London must be properly managed and not left solely to the market. At present, the government shows every sign of abdicating its responsibility to plan the downsizing of London's hospitals and William Waldegrave needs to tackle this issue urgently.

If NHS trusts and the new role of health authorities as purchasers are positive aspects of the reforms, the same cannot be said of the GP fund holding scheme.

'Unless hospitals are faced with the prospect of losing contracts, there may not be a sufficiently strong motivation to improve performance'

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Under this scheme, doctors in practices serving more than 9,000 patients are able to volunteer to hold a budget with which to buy a limited range of hospital services for their patients. The scheme is undoubtedly attractive in giving GPs financial leverage with which to bring about improvements in care on behalf of patients but it has a number of significant drawbacks.

Foremost among these drawbacks is the threat posed to equity. As recent experience has illustrated, some GP fund holders have negotiated contracts with hospitals which allow their patients to obtain quicker access to treatment than the patients of GPs who are not fund holders. In these cases, the patient's need for treatment, as judged by doctors, will be a less important consideration in determining admission to hospital than the purchasing power of GPs. This is clearly difficult to reconcile with a commitment to equity in service provision.

Another drawback is that fund holding creates an incentive for GPs to be more cautious in accepting certain patients onto their lists. If GPs have to balance their budgets, then one way in which they can do this is to favour patients who are younger, healthier and inexpensive to treat. This would be to the disadvantage of patients who are older, sicker and incur greater expenditure. Again, equity will suffer, and those who most need good medical care will find it more difficult to obtain.

An even more fundamental difficulty is that fund holding threatens to destroy trust between patients and GPs by introducing financial considerations into treatment decisions. This is not to argue that GPs should be oblivious to the cost of their decisions. Rather, it is to highlight the need for rigorous safeguards to ensure that fund holding does not result in lower standards of care. At present, these safeguards simply do not exist, and in any case are almost impossible to devise given the many factors involved in doctors' decisions on when to refer patients to hospital for diagnosis and treatment. On balance, then, the pitfalls of the fund holding scheme outweigh the benefits.

In view of this, how should the reforms be taken forward? With a general election approaching rapidly, this question needs to be addressed from the point of view of both the government and the opposition. As far as the government is concerned, efforts should be concentrated on developing health authorities as the purchasers of care. In this respect, ministers have signally failed to help their own cause by neglecting the purchasing function until very recently. Priority has so far been given to the establishment of NHS trusts and the strengthening of management and audit systems in hospitals. Only in the last few weeks has the government acknowledged the need to make a similar investment in purchasing.

'The opposition is entering dangerous territory in appearing to align itself so closely with professional interests opposed to the reforms'

The development of the purchaser role must be given more attention because the existence of effective purchasers is essential to the success of the reforms. The NHS will not become more responsive to the needs and demands of patients and the public unless health authorities are established as a countervailing force to the power of providers. Not least, the strategy for the nation's health set out in the consultative document published in June depends crucially on health authorities attaching priority to the prevention of illness and disease and the promotion of good health. This will only be achieved if health authorities are prepared to question established patterns of service provision and shift the balance of spending away from hospital services towards community health services and primary care.

To highlight the need to develop the role of purchasers is to make more than just a theoretical point. Over the last year, health authorities at the leading edge of the reforms have started to demonstrate what might be possible in the future. For example, some health authorities have worked closely with GPs in deciding where to place contracts for services. The developing alliance between health authorities and GPs is emerging as a potent force for changing the nature of hospital services. Hospital doctors are being required to be more responsive to GPs and to deliver services that GPs and health authorities determine are needed by patients. If they do not, then contracts may be switched to other providers who are able to meet the expectations of purchasers.

Experience so far also suggests that it should be possible to give greater priority to those services which in the past have competed for scarce resources, such as health promotion, paramedical services and common operations for which patients often have to wait. One way in which this can be done is by health authorities allocating some of their budgets to primary health care teams to enable more work to be done in doctors' surgeries instead of in hospitals. A number of health authorities have already developed plans along these lines. Over a period of years, it should be possible to redraw the boundaries between primary care and hospitals to the benefit of patients. Again, developments in health care technology, such as the greater availability of diagnostic equipment in general practice, are likely to accelerate this process.

The government has encouraged health authorities to act as champions of the people in their purchasing role. However, the champion of the people role has no legitimacy or credibility if health authorities remain ivory tower contracting bodies governed by a small group of managers and non-executive members, many of whom have come into the NHS from business backgrounds. In recognition of this, some health authorities have begun to develop strategies for building links with their communities.

Various initiatives have been pursued including working with community health councils, community and voluntary groups, and local authorities. In some areas this involves health authorities forging 'healthy alliances' with other agencies in concerted campaigns to improve health. A number of health authorities are also actively creating locality offices as a way of grounding their decisions in a proper assessment of the needs of different areas. This applies particularly in those districts where health authorities are collaborating in joint purchasing arrangements or merging to form larger agencies with greater purchasing power.

As these examples illustrate, there is enormous potential in the new role of health authorities as purchasers. By piecing together the fragments of experience gained so far, it is possible to envisage how a quite different kind of health service may emerge. Expenditure would be redirected to those services likely to bring about the greatest improvement in health, and health authorities would use their financial leverage to hold providers accountable. GPs would have a bigger voice in the allocation of resources and would themselves assume greater responsibility for the care of their patients. Health authorities would base their decisions on a thorough assessment of the population's needs, including extensive public consultation and the involvement of community groups.

The challenge is to turn this vision into reality. The difficulties of so doing are enormous. Despite the best efforts of those health authorities that have seen the possibilities and have worked hard in the last year to understand and implement their new responsibilities, purchasing remains underdeveloped. Many of the top managers have moved into NHS trusts and there is a shortage of good people and skills in areas central to purchasing, such as public health and contracting. The NHS continues to be a provider-driven service and ministers will have to be serious in their (recently discovered) commitment to purchasing if the reforms are really to work for the benefit of patients.

This analysis begins to indicate how Labour might take the reforms forward if it were to be elected. The retention of health authorities as purchasers, perhaps with a more representative membership, is the most significant element. Trusts could also form a key component in Labour's strategy, again with greater local involvement in their governance and stronger safeguards for accountability. In parallel, Labour should continue the policy of redistributing the NHS budget to ensure that health authorities have the purchasing power they require to meet the population's needs. This would involve a shift away from

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London and the south east to those regions which have lost out in the past.

In fact, Labour's policy document on the health service recognises the need for change and contains many sensible proposals. There is even a degree of overlap with the government's reforms in Labour's support for a division between strategic and operational management in health authorities (similar to the separation of purchaser and provider roles), the use of performance agreements to link strategic and operational management levels (for which read contracts), and the introduction of flexible budgeting arrangements (not unlike 'money following patients'). The development of these policies signifies that Labour perceives that there may be some merits in the government's strategy, even if opposition spokespersons are not prepared to admit this publicly.

But if Labour is serious in its concern to refashion services to better meet the needs of consumers and citizens, then a more radical approach is required. Incremental adjustments to the status quo, however well intentioned, are unlikely to be sufficient in meeting the challenges of the 1990s. Building on the best bits of the current reforms along the lines outlined above offers a better starting point. The point that Labour has not yet grasped fully is that a commitment to the principles of comprehensiveness, access and equity in health service provision should not be confused with a defence of particular organisational arrangements.

The task facing politicians is to make the best use of public resources at a time when the economy is unlikely to generate sufficient growth to permit a large increase in public expenditure. This will almost certainly involve a shift away from monolithic, bureaucratic structures to more pluralistic and flexible funding and delivery systems. The separation of purchaser and provider roles, the introduction of NHS trusts, and the use of contracts to channel resources from purchasers to providers exemplify the new pluralism as applied to the NHS.

Within the financing and delivery systems that are emerging, there is an urgent need to develop financial incentives which encourage the provision of high standard care at least cost. Allowing money to follow patients illustrates how these incentives might operate and other approaches must also be explored. There is no reason why this should not involve a degree of competition provided that the operation of the market is carefully managed and regulated. Unless hospitals are faced with the prospect of losing contracts, there may not be a sufficiently strong motivation to improve performance. However, this would differ from a real market in that contracts would be moved at the end of the process, following negotiations between purchasers and providers and a search for other ways of tackling problems in service delivery, and not at the beginning. Put slightly differently, the *threat* of competition would be more important than the reality in ensuring that providers met the standards set by purchasers.

'Cutbacks in employment are clearly painful for staff but they should not necessarily be equated with a worse service for patients'

The Swedish health services are moving in this direction in a series of initiatives led by local authorities, which seek to introduce 'public competition' into health services. Hospitals which are run by county councils will compete for public resources in a scheme which closely parallels the NHS reforms.

The interest shown in market mechanisms in the country which in the past has been most admired by those on the Left for its commitment to comprehensive high quality public service provision should give pause for thought. Old structures and systems are under review everywhere and if the challenge of the private sector is to be met then a fundamental review of established methods of doing things is essential. A commitment by Labour to the ideas outlined here would carry a great deal more conviction than the spectacle of opposition politicians aligning themselves with powerful professional vested interests and centres of elitism and prestige (such as London's teaching hospitals) that stand to lose most from the attempt to modernise and improve the NHS.●

Chris Ham is a fellow at the King's Fund College.

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The 20 Billion Dollar Man

The Group of Seven are due to meet Gorbachev in London in the middle of July. **John Lloyd** urges support for Western aid for Moscow

Around the end of last month, a group of Russian and American economists finished work, in a suite of rooms at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, on a document which immodestly proposed the salvation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It did so by mapping out a programme which would kill off socialism, replace the corrupt Soviets with genuine elections and allow it to cease to be a union. The leader of the Soviet side, a 39-year old economist and former deputy premier of Russia, Grigory Yavlinsky, had been sent there at the express wish of the Soviet president.

As his work progressed through late May and early June, the Soviet government made it clearer than it had before what his status was. Though he held no official post (except as adviser to the president of Kazakhstan), Yavlinsky's plan was, said Yevgeny Primakov, an aide to the Soviet president, of the first importance in setting out ways in which Western aid could be used in the Soviet reform process. If he were to be successful, his ideas would be incorporated in the continuing redrafting of the anti-crisis plan, which has rolled about the various economic institutes and union and republican government structures for the past three months; and inasmuch as Western assistance would be forthcoming, so much the more radical the anti-crisis plan would become.

Earlier in the month, Gorbachev took the occasion of his Nobel prize acceptance speech in Oslo to comment obliquely on Yavlinsky's task. Perestroika had recently been revised, he said: 'we have come to the conclusion that there is a need for a kind of synchronisation of our actions towards (the) end (of bringing the Soviet Union fully into the world economy) with those of the Group of Seven and of the European Communities. In other words, we are thinking of a fundamentally new phase in our international co-operation'. Thus, he continued, it was urgently necessary to agree a level of co-operation to ensure the success of perestroika. 'To me', he said, 'it is self-evident that if Soviet perestroika succeeds, there will be a real chance of building a new world order. And if perestroika fails, the prospect of entering a new peaceful period in history will vanish, at least in the foreseeable future.'

It is self-evident that in both his aides' and his own remarks, the Soviet president had left a hint of menace hanging in the air. 'Nice little world you have here', he was almost saying. 'Pity if anything happened to it, just for the want of a few billion bucks.'

For Yavlinsky's plan is nothing if not ambitious. He was the co-author, with Stanislav Shatalin (then a Gorbachev economic adviser), of the '500 day' programme of radical reform: it seemed to have presidential approval, but was unceremoniously dumped last year when it was evident that Gorbachev, even had he wished to (which was never clear) could not get agreement on it from his power structure. Yavlinsky then began working with Professor Graham Allison, a former dean of the Kennedy School and a sometime consultant to the US government, on a programme of reform which would be calibrated with assistance from Western governments and the international financial institutions – the IMF, the World Bank and the new European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). This drew in other well-connected academics – Sam Fischer, former chief economist of the World Bank who had overseen the production of the IMF/World Bank/OECD/EBRD report on the Soviet economy, published at the end of last year; Jeffrey Sachs, who was the dominant foreign influence on the economic thinking of the Polish Solidarity government; Robert Blackwill, the former aide to President George Bush on Soviet affairs.

All of these men, in different ways, had been drawn professionally (and often emotionally) into the transformation process in eastern Europe. Sachs, especially, had become a missionary for the process of rapid marketisation, and had become a fierce opponent of the 'third way' in which elements of the market were introduced into a quasi-socialist economy. There were differences – sometimes large – between the economists, but a basic agreement that the Soviets should be offered, in Allison and Blackwill's phrase, a 'grand bargain' which would draw the major Western economies into a relationship with reform in which certain economic and democratic goals would be agreed and for which substantial assistance would be offered.

These goals are vast. As the plan went through its final drafts, it became clear that the Yavlinsky-Allison team was proposing a complete revolution in two formidably difficult stages. In the first, broadly put, prices would be largely decontrolled, the rouble moved farther along the road to convertibility and privatisation of enterprises begun. Concomitantly, elections for the all-union Supreme Soviet should be held. In the second, these processes should be completed or stepped up – prices wholly freed, the rouble made convertible and privatisations accelerated. Aid from abroad, on a range between $20-$35 billion a year, would be directed, in the first phase, to providing consumer goods for a market which could be reasonably expected otherwise to be starved by the collapse of many of its own producers; in the second, support for the rouble as it moved to convertibility, followed by the provision of income support for the unemployed, and generally, investment of various kinds in infrastructure. The Soviet Union would become first an associate, and then at the end of phase one or the beginning of phase two, a full member of the World Bank and the IMF; these institutions, with the EBRD and Western govern-

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ments operating through the expanded group of 24 which had co-ordinated aid for eastern Europe, would oversee and monitor the process.

Beneath the economists' prose lies the proposition of an extraordinary and unique political adventure. It is one for which both the nerves and the imagination of the Western leaders, who gather this month in London at the Group of Seven summit, must be strong. It is thus to be expected that large objections have been raised about the plan, for it proposes the spending of very large amounts of Western citizens' money on a country which has, until now, squandered their earlier assistance on the preservation of a corrupt and authoritarian system.

The root objection has been that the West cannot and must not give aid to a government which has no claim to the people's trust or support, and certainly has not got it. Gorbachev is the unelected head of state, presiding over an unelected government, pushing through a programme which has never been presented to the people, and is lowering their living standards in unavailing attempts to improve a system which his party had clamped on the country by brutality on a scale never before seen and only since matched, in relative terms, by the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. This point is often and forcefully made by nationalists in the republics and radicals everywhere – the very people whom the West supports and encourages. Morality apart, the Gorbachev governments have been profligate and – on his own admission – vacillating and plainly wrong on economic questions. 'Why throw good money after bad?' is a reasonable question to put.

'The root objection has been that the West cannot and must not give aid to a government which has no claim to the people's trust or support'

Since this appears in *Marxism Today*, a magazine aimed largely, though not wholly, at the British Left, it is worth adding this in parentheses. The British Left has never, as far as I know, worked out what to do about perestroika. In its early days it was hailed with some enthusiasm. More recently, it has been quietly dropped, and a certain measured enthusiasm for the radicals and the nationalists has taken its place – though with important exceptions, like Eric Hobsbawm, who has pungently criticised the Baltic and other nationalisms (in my view too harshly). A few leftists have identified the miners and other working-class sections as capable of carrying the seeds of a new socialism. Others again have called for a third way (the current edition of *Socialist Register* contains a good selection of such views). But the Left has not taken a position on what is actually on offer: a continuation of a stagnant, lurching, semi-reform fraught with the danger of reaction, or a vast transformation of the kind sketched in by Yavlinsky, in which marketisation and liberal democratic practice is the overt goal. Time it did.

On the international level, a 'left' position is that taken by the Christian Democratic governments of Germany and Italy (to a lesser and less clear degree the socialist government of France), the two G7 members most enthusiastic for assistance to Soviet reform. They believe that Gorbachev still has political tasks to perform; that he can manage both economic change and democratisation, and that his policies and government must thus be supported insofar as he proves them right. Both countries, of course, fear collapse and uncontrolled emigration; both have an increasingly large stake in the Soviet economy; both have interventionist reflexes. The Japanese, who might naturally make common cause with them, are presently hanging tough over the issue of the four Kurile Islands, taken from Japan after the war by the Soviet Union, and the bar to good relations ever since. It is commonly supposed that once that matter was settled, the Japanese would be willing to open their vast coffers to the USSR, and, more importantly, support their business people in the Soviet market.

To call it 'left', however, is to do even more damage to that presently abused word than is done here in the Soviet Union, where pro-capitalists are commonly called Left and pro-communists commonly called Right. In fact, the argument within the West is largely a confused one: those who worked with Yavlinsky were not just anti-communists but of a liberal-radical turn of mind. They are opposed by old Leftists in the Soviet Union and elsewhere who see them (rightly) as intent on recreating capitalism, and by the Western conservative Right, which thinks, or claims to think, they are suckers for Gorbachev, or that they are social engineers who should keep their hands off the Soviet Union while it collapses by itself.

Communism is indeed collapsing in the Soviet Union. Though its power bases are everywhere, and often function quite well, it has no will or capacity for either reform or reaction. Everywhere one goes now, the power centres – especially the now-disbanded but once vast Komsomol – are trying to 'go private': managers are forming phoney co-operatives to produce over-priced services for the enterprises they themselves run; party functionaries are making joint ventures; state companies are setting up commodity exchanges; academic institutes are advising foreign and Soviet companies; professors are teaching business courses; and of course, the shadow economy surges ahead, taking over whole sectors of economic life. It is monstrously inegalitarian and causes mass anxiety among those least able to survive – but the sheer scope of the disintegration and the vigour of the private pursuits mean that, every day, it becomes more resistant to any kind of reactionary force.

On top of all this, the government does not so much govern as seek to ride certain forces. Since the hopelessly inefficient attempt by the hardliners to unseat Boris Yeltsin from his then position as Russian parliamentary leader in April, Gorbachev has swung away from an alliance with them (which was never close on either side) and come over to a tactical alliance with Yeltsin (now the Russian president) and to an endorsement of republican autonomy and renewed efforts for market reform. A careful unpicking of history will be required to determine how far Gorbachev made common cause with hardliners, why he swung back, and what convinced him he must seek Western aid. For now, though, Gorbachev seems to be genuine.

If that is the case, he has committed himself, roughly, to the following: to lower the standard of living of the Soviet people for several years; to greatly accelerating the rate of unemployment, already climbing strongly; to ending any semblance of roughly equal incomes, and turning their determination over to the market; to actually, rather than verbally and formally, ending the monopoly of the Communist Party over effective political life (something Yeltsin's election will greatly speed in any case); to granting substantial economic and political power to the 15 republics – including the right of exit from the Soviet Union – and thus confining his office to foreign affairs and macroeconomics. There is no way of telling how far he can do it – in reality, how far he and Yeltsin can do it, or can agree to do it.

Thus the London G7 summit is faced with a serious decision. How far to get involved, and on what terms? The Yavlinsky plan – if it is adopted by the Soviet government as an official programme – is repeatedly and determinedly conditional: assistance will be forthcoming *only* for deep economic change, *only* for genuine development of democratic forms. To assent to it in principle – even before money is considered – means becoming a partner in one of the roughest political rides of our time; allowing the West to become the target of demagogues, as well as quite sincere people, who will see the wealthy foreigners as screwing the poor Soviets to the ground for the sake of profit. Most Western politicians have enough troubles – why do they need this?

Because, in the end, Gorbachev is right. It would be a pity if anything happened to a world which has immeasurably benefited from his reforms so far and which can benefit further. In entering the world market and the world division of labour, the Soviet Union will become part of a system of corporate capitalism and financial networks of power which dwarf those of governments and which has, in the end, flattened the Soviet Union's efforts at socialist autarchy. It is this we are being asked to support, and it is better than anything else around.●

John Lloyd is Moscow correspondent of the Financial Times.

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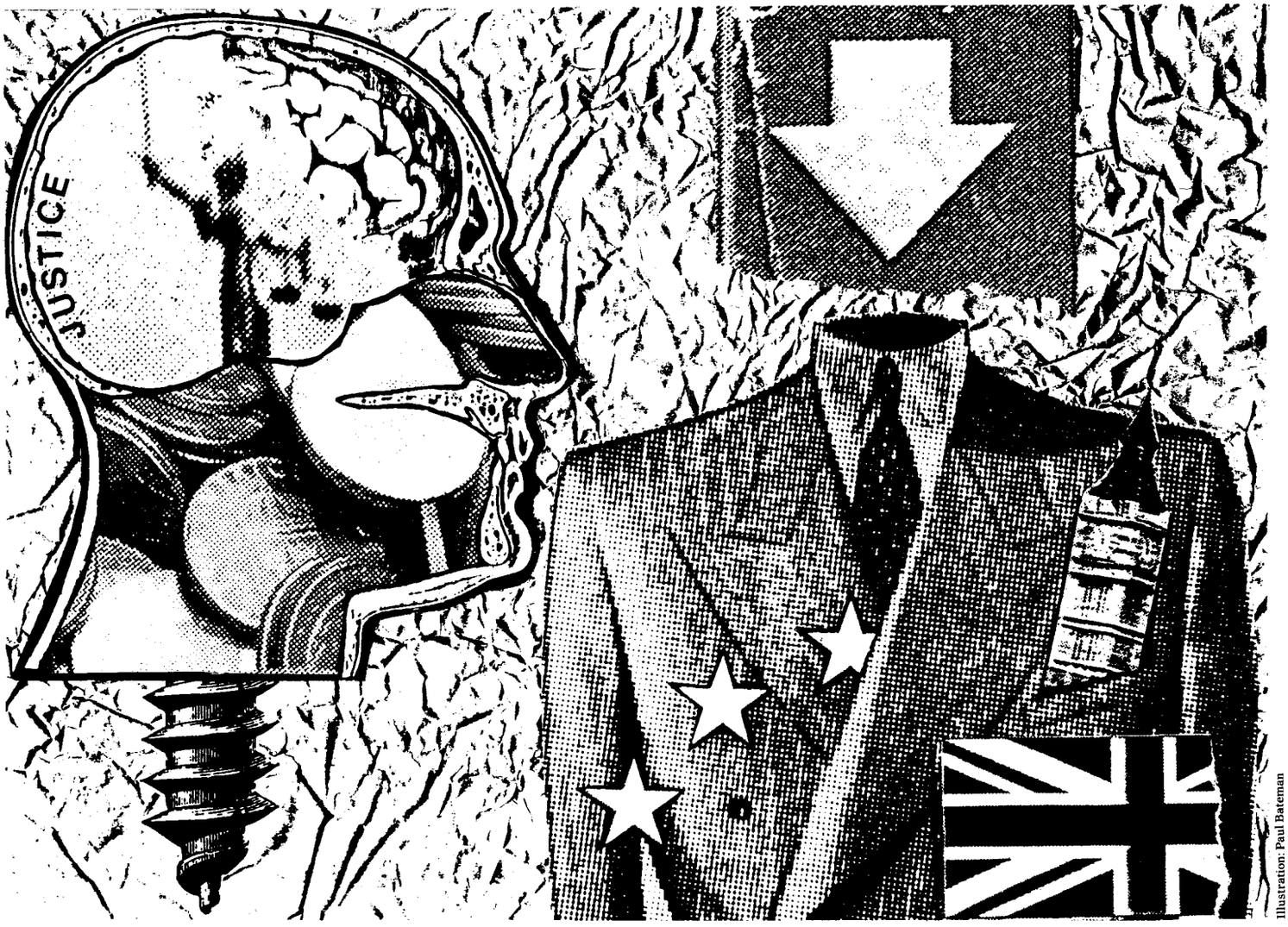

Illustration: Paul Bateman

Whose Line Is It Anyway?

The social market is the new buzz phrase. **Charlie Leadbeater** explains why and suggests what it should mean

Politics is converging around one central idea – the idea of the social market. Like cars coming onto a roundabout from different directions, the political parties are circling one another in their espousal of citizenship rights, their commitment to the public sector and their willingness to adjust to Europeanisation. All the parties are committed to a version of the social market – a socially responsible, economically efficient, market economy. The idea of the social market maps out what has become the high ground of British politics. It is the ground which has to be captured for a party to win power.

The elevation of the idea of the social market is the most important political consequence of the recession. We are in the midst of a shift from a decade when free market ideas were at the cutting edge, to a decade when politics will be organised around social market ideas. In the 1980s Thatcherism's aim was to create an unconscious society, a society in which it was possible only for individuals to have goals and make choices. Society was no more than the unconscious, unplanned outcome of millions of unco-ordinated social choices. The rise of social market ideas marks the start of an attempt to make society conscious again of the choices it can and should make.

At first sight it might seem improbable to claim that the social market maps the high ground of politics. It is an idea which has been knocking around in various guises for several decades. It originated among free market economists in Germany in the 1940s and became the touchstone of German politics in the 1960s under Chancellor Erhard. It was transplanted to Britain in the 1970s as a free market idea by Sir Keith Joseph before David Owen juggled with it in the 1980s. The social market is like an old pop song which is constantly being re-released by modern performers anxious to do cover versions of it.

The meaning of the social market is not at all clear. The inheritors of Joseph's tradition claim it as the neo-liberal idea that the most economically efficient and socially just policy is delivered by the most open and deregulated market. That is quite different from Chris Patten's vision modelled on the solidaristic market economies of central Europe such as Germany and Austria.

The content of the idea is very flimsy. It is not an economic theory. It has nothing useful to say about how interest rates should be set, taxes levied or public spending determined except in the most general terms. It is not a political ideology based on distinctive values. It is not backed by a body of analysis. The idea of the social market

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is remarkably empty, no more than a political slogan.

Yet it is precisely that vacuity which has ensured its longevity as a rallying point for successive generations of politicians keen to adapt the idea to the political circumstances they face. Slogans gain tremendous power when they express a shift in the political centre of gravity. A political language can languish on the margins for years before suddenly acquiring currency when it articulates a deep-seated shift in political and social priorities. The free-market language of Thatcherism commanded the high ground of British politics in the 1980s by articulating disenchantment with the failings of the postwar settlement. Now it is the language of the social market which is articulating the aspiration to move beyond Thatcherism. The rise of the social market confronts politics with a central task over the next few years – how to create the conditions for a successful social market. Two conditions matter, and if they are not met the social market will be without foundations.

First, successful social market economies adopt a social approach to production. They recognise that production is a collective activity, which needs strong institutions bridging the divide between the public and the private to support education and training, the diffusion of technology and investment.

What makes social market economies work is not just a set of market exchanges but a dense web of partnerships, co-operative relationships, obligations and duties. In successful social market economies the hidden hand of the market is matched in importance by the hidden hand of their economic cultures which, for instance, determines the value they put on investment and education. Neither party fully recognises the extent of the institutional reform and cultural upheaval which will be needed to make the UK a successful social market economy in its approach to innovation and production.

Second, society should be organised around principles of social justice as well as market efficiency. The market will not be the sole mechanism for distributing rewards, resources, and life chances.

All the parties are committed to a more compassionate, caring Britain. But they are being repelled in that direction by the worst excesses of the inequalities created by Thatcherism. They have not been pulled to the social market by a positive conception of social justice which promises to change society.

Creating a successful social market economy will require a radical programme of modernisation which must sweep through Britains institutions and culture. If it is code for pragmatism and caution it will be a complete failure.

What is at stake in this debate is the meaning of citizenship and community in a modern economy. It is about the rights and duties of citizenship which can be sustained in economies open to the world markets. It is centrally about whether there is a strong enough idea of common, social interest to underpin approaches to both production and distributive justice in a modern society.

Politics has been brought to this point by the failure of earlier versions of the economic roles of citizenship and community. Under the Keynesian welfare state in the 1950s and 1960s there was a fairly clear connection between economics, community and citizenship. Economic growth made possible a social surplus, which funded collective public spending on education, health, housing and transport. Those social programmes underpinned the economy by boosting demand and providing the social foundations for the postwar political consensus. In the context of such predictable, well-managed growth it was possible to expand the idea of citizenship.

Citizenship has always had a political and constitutional content: our democratic rights and the right to equality before the law. But in the 1950s and 1960s citizenship took on a socio-economic character as well by including entitlements to welfare benefits, education and housing.

As a result the state and the public sector took on a much wider set of obligations to its citizens. It guaranteed them not just political rights but an economic safe haven, within which they would have a guaranteed minimum standard of living.

To establish that safe haven, politics and the state intervened in economics and the market. It was partly through the consumption of publicly provided goods that people expressed and realised their citizenship. A stable national economy was able to provide wider citizenship rights within a clear framework of commitments to collective provision.

This settled relationship between economics, citizenship and community could not be maintained. The broadening notion of citizenship could not be supported by a deteriorating economy facing mounting international competition. The notion of community and collective interests was undermined by social mobility, increasing social differentiation and simple sectarianism as people attempted to protect themselves against decline.

Thatcherism attempted a radical rewriting of the relationships. It attempted to constrain and discipline the notion of citizenship within economically affordable limits. It renounced any commitment to community other than the historic attachments of nation. It wanted to create a society in which people were more consumers than citizens.

It drew a sharp distinction between the political and socio-economic aspects of citizenship and set out to restructure both. Politically we became citizens of an increasingly centralised, authoritarian state. Citizenship rights to welfare benefits and publicly provided goods had to be severely constrained to what could be afforded.

Thatcherism attempted to shift society away from politics to economics. Britain's economic decline was due to the politicisation of economic decisions. Tough choices were avoided. Companies which should have closed were kept going by subsidy. Trade union pay demands which should have been denied were accommodated. According to Thatcherism economic decisions had to be removed from the corrupting world of politics and returned to their rightful place in the land of economics. To achieve that the market had to dominate over the state as the mechanism for allocating resources. That in turn entailed a shift from the public to the private, from collective decision making to individual choices.

The aim was to create an economically dynamic, unconscious society filled by individuals with limited citizenship rights, little sense of community but an unlimited appetite for enterprise and consumption. Thatcherism maintained that only individuals could have economic goals. Society was no more than an arrangement to allow individuals to pursue these goals. We gather to make money from one another and fight wars but very little else. Society's well-being could not be consciously and collectively addressed. The state of society could be no more than the unplanned and unintended by-product of a myriad of individual choices. The economy can only be made dynamic by making society unconscious.

'Economic virtue will be about conserving rather than consuming, valuing education and knowledge rather than glorying in skin-of-the-pants, cash-in-hand enterprises'

The emergence of the social market as the organising point for politics is the chief product of the failure of Thatcherism's vision. Politics is attempting to map out a new relationship between economics, citizenship and community. Five main factors have led to this point.

The first is the ascendancy of the market. It is now consensual that the market is central to any efficient economy. Central planning has been discredited as a means by which society should collectively seek to control its economic future. In future, any attempts to sustain citizenship and express community must be compatible with a market economy. The question is: what sort of market economy should that be?

The old polarities of markets and planning are irrelevant. The new poles of debate will be about whether the economy is free market or social market, protectionist or open to trade, borrower or lender, environmentally despoiling or ecologically responsible.

Two historic developments are meeting in the idea of the social. The ascendancy of market economies in the world economy and the collapse of planned economies. In the first clearing of the dust after a fundamental shift in the terms of political debate, people are

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searching for a way forward which would allow market economies to be socially conscious and responsible.

The second factor is the relative economic failure of the free-market economies compared with social-market economies. The leading free-market economies based on individualism, deregulation and unfettered financial markets – the US and the UK – are in the throes of recession. The stable social market economies in Germany and Japan are growing.

That short-term divergence in their fortunes is a reflection of much deeper developments. Social market economies are successful because they overcome the shortcomings of the market. They compensate for the market's tendency to overvalue the short-term. They are more able to take concerted, strategic decisions about the path of economic development they want to take as a society. This strategic capacity should not be confused with planning. It requires collaboration between the central and local state, banks and industry, large companies and their suppliers.

Take just two examples. The Germans have decided to target aerospace as a sector to expand into in the coming decade, to replace the declining growth provided by their car and electronics companies. That has been achieved by reorganising the entire German aerospace industry around Daimler Benz, with the collaboration of Deutsche Bank and under the sponsorship of the state. The German aerospace industry will in the next decade replace the British industry as the biggest and fastest growing in Europe.

The Germans spend more on research and development both in their universities and within companies. But crucially they have a web of intermediate institutions, funded by the public and private sectors, such as the Max Planck Institute and trade associations, which help to bridge the gap between universities and companies. These bridging institutions create the basis for more concertion and coherence in policy.

The links are cemented by a web of obligations and duties, rather than just contracts and exchanges of money. Successful economies have to foster both competition and co-operation.

The third factor is recoil at the moral consequences of the free market. This resurrection of social responsibility is taking several forms. But the common thread is the idea that society faces collective problems which it is either equitable or efficient to find collective solutions to. One source of concern is inequality, symbolised by cardboard city and the outcry over executive pay; another is the environmental and economic inefficiency of rundown public transport. There is a heightened sense of our obligations to poorer societies and future societies to whom we will bequeath our environment.

The common theme is that it is not possible to completely privatise responsibility. Society's fabric cannot be maintained if people are constantly encouraged to opt out of obligations to anyone other than their family or employer. To win legitimacy a market economy must sustain a sense of community and belonging as well as delivering consumer durables.

'In the 1980s the Tories took their ideas from across the Atlantic. Now they are looking over the Channel for inspiration'

The fourth factor is pressure to recast the relationship between citizens, society and the state. This is affecting both the political and the socio-economic rights of citizenship.

The agenda on political citizenship has moved in reaction to the centralisation and authoritarianism of Thatcherism. The threads of a new constitutional settlement between citizens and the state are emerging around proportional representation, a bill of rights, the renewal of local government and devolution. These reforms would rewrite the meaning of political citizenship. The single overriding relationship of citizen and central state would be replaced by a textured web of relationships between citizens and political institutions. The economic power of the state would be more dispersed but as a result the political system would probably provide the economy with greater stability.

The state as provider of services is also being redefined and with it the idea of citizen as consumer. The crisis of the public sector which Thatcherism located in the late 1970s is still unresolved. The public sector will be subject to wide-ranging reform in the coming decade, changing how services are provided, by whom, how they are paid for and what we are entitled to. The old notions of collective mass provision are giving way to ideas about choice and flexibility. These reforms will change the character of collective provision, the nature of citizenship rights upon the state and the way those rights are met. We are still searching for an economically sustainable way of meeting public responsibilities.

The final factor is Europeanisation. The social market has a particular appeal to Chris Patten as a device to close the gap between British free-market capitalism and the social-market capitalism practised in the German heart of central Europe.

But it is not just a device. It marks a complete change of focus for the Tories. In the 1980s they took most of their ideas from across the Atlantic. Now they are looking over the Channel for inspiration. Labour too has become more consciously European. It has tried to transform itself into a European social democratic party. The rise of the social market is a recognition that British politics will increasingly be organised around European issues.

Those issues will increasingly be about the nature of European citizenship and the character of the community. In the last few years European politics has been dominated by the economics of integration, the 1992 programme and the terms for economic and monetary union. But in the next few years the agenda will move onto issues of citizenship: who will be able to claim what sort of rights as citizens of the EC as opposed to citizens of nation states? The terms of political union will define the constitutional rights of citizens. On the horizon are questions to do with European fiscal policies and the extent of social protection. The concerns of European politics will move on from the creation of a single market and a single currency, to social and political issues to do with the nature of European citizenship. British politics will have to be part of this movement.

So the social market has been elevated to the high ground of politics by powerful forces which have thrown up three basic questions. And the social market is an umbrella beneath which these questions shelter. How should a declining economy, prone to recession, be reorganised to instill dynamism and discipline? What are the rights of citizens, and how can they be delivered in an internationally competitive economy? What are the nature of the bonds which mean a society is more than a marketplace, and how can these guide policy?

The trouble is that the social market could either hide these questions or help to bring them out into the open. One version of social market politics would avoid these questions. It comes in various guises – Thatcherism with a human face, a return to corporatism, the renewal of the old Croslandite tradition of simply funding public services from a growth dividend. What these approaches share in common is a conservatism about the extent of reform required in British society. They see the social market as a stable, rather comfortable breathing space after the turmoil of the 1980s: the social market as a sort of lay-by in which politics can park itself for a rest.

This pragmatic social market approach would be a disaster. For if one thing is clear, it is that Britain needs continued radicalism to modernise itself. That is clear in the way its endemic economic weaknesses have tipped it into recession' it is also clear in the depth of the crisis facing the public sector. Tinkering will not be sufficient. Radical, root and branch reform is required. Rather than a static social market which just holds society at the status quo, we need a modernising social market programme with long-term ambitions to drive reform through the institutions and culture of society. To create the conditions for a successful social market, that reform programme needs to have two main aims.

The first is to create the social underpinnings of a competitive economy. That will mean combining government policy, with reform to the institutions of the economy and changes to our economic culture. They must move in tandem.

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The aim of formal government policies would be to create a much more developed framework of laws and institutions within which the private sector would work. The objective of public policy should be to create a public space around companies. So for instance, one vital legal move would be to alter legislation governing takeovers in order to move away from the deal making culture which so destabilises manufacturing companies. On the institutional front it would mean central and local government sponsoring the development of bodies which bridge the public and private sectors to transfer people, skills and technology between them. Britain needs stronger local economic institutions which would bring together employers and local authorities, politics and economics at the local level.

The institution which is most central to reform would be the company. Any viable social market programme must set out to radically reform the company. Although the political parties have policies on investment, industrial policy, education and training, none has a policy programme for the company as such. The last time the Left thought seriously about companies was during the 1970s debate about planning agreements. The debate in the 1980s was dominated by questions of ownership, privatisation and nationalisation, rather than about corporate responsibility and performance. As a result companies have got off rather lightly.

The main aim of such a policy would be to redress the imbalance in corporate obligations in the UK. British companies' main obligation is to their shareholders, the owners of their assets. In Germany and Japan the relationship with shareholders is only one of several obligations that companies recognise. In those economies companies are the heart of a web of relations which they have to maintain. There are obligations to invest in local economic development; environmental obligations; obligations to workers to provide health care, training and childcare; duties to help suppliers to develop their products and dues owed to other employers to collaborate in funding training or research and development. Companies must recognise their obligations to communities, but also be able to rely upon collective institutions to support them.

It will only be possible to create a more socially responsible economy with more socially responsible companies, which recognise social obligations as well as financial and economic ones.

These policy and institutional reforms need to move in tandem with cultural changes in our economic values and expectations. Economic cultures spread and reproduce ideas of what is economically virtuous. In the 1980s the source of economic virtue was consumer choice, either in making those choices or in meeting them. The 1990s will encourage very different ideas. Economic virtue will be about conserving rather than consuming, investing in assets rather than running them down, valuing education and knowledge rather than glorying in skin-of-the-pants, cash-in-hand enterprise. German economic success is only partly attributable to its institutions. Much of it is due to its culture and values: training, professionalism and knowledge are more highly valued than in the UK. The Japanese approach to education relies upon a partnership of parental dedication and institutional discipline. Without change in the economic culture of society, people changing what they value and how they behave, it will be impossible to create a social market.

The second area which needs radicalism is the idea of social justice. Without a notion of social justice, the social market is morally vacuous, because it offers no alternative to the market as a way of determining people's life chances. This turns on the following questions. What scale of resources are available for redistributive policies? On what basis would resources be redistributed? What are the guiding moral principles, the new public ethics which would underpin the social market?

Should resources be distributed according to need, merit, or contribution? Should society be organised to realise individual choices and aspirations; is protection of the rights of the individual the basis for social justice? Or should society be guided by an idea of the collective good, those things which it shares to make it a civilised society and which in turn justify redistributive taxation? To put it crudely, does someone who is affluent transfer money to someone less affluent out of guilt or fear, from a recognition that as individuals they should enjoy equality of opportunity or because they are both members of a society which believes in certain minimum standards of treatment?

British society is too diverse, too fragmented to generate anything more than agreement on a minimal notion of the common good. Yet society must be more than a loose association, the only purpose of which is to help individuals to pursue their own narrow ends. What is needed is an approach which renews the link between individual rights and collective guarantees, a progressive individualism. A few general principles do seem to have some purchase and could be developed.

There is a deep rooted sense of fairness and proportion in British society. The unfairness of the poll tax was one of its great weaknesses. The outcry over boardroom pay has also drawn out this sense of fair treatment of individuals.

This commitment to a fair society entails a commitment to an open and meritocratic society of equality of opportunity. What is the point of education if talent and learning is then not rewarded? The old institutions of British society which are closed by prejudice or privilege should be opened up. Making Britain a more open, less class-ridden, talent-based, meritocratic society, opens up a potentially radical popular agenda, one dedicated to breaking down the old establishment. It was this which lay behind the ferocity of Thatcherism's attack on the old establishment which had let Britain down. Major attempted to pick it up with his classless society slogan. This rich political vein of individual opportunity, creating the procedures for individual abilities to be equally developed and fairly rewarded, is waiting to be mined.

'We need a modernising social market programme with long-term ambitions to drive reform through the institutions and culture of society'

Where the idea of collective responsibilities should come into play is at two quite different levels where communities can define themselves and recognise their shared interests. The first is the local level where communities might be able to define themselves in contrast with the nation. It may be possible in localities, cities or regions to generate a notion of common interests which will remain elusive at the national level. So political reform to devolve power to more meaningful communities is a prerequisite for making possible a policy of social justice based on a recognition of common interests. These common interests will only be relevant to people if they are evident and open and that often means localised.

The second area where a notion of collective responsibility is clearly very powerful is in Britain's dealings with other societies. International issues have produced a tremendous upsurge in a sense of joint responsibility lacking over many domestic issues. There is also a developing sense of our collective responsibility to future collective generations. In these areas policies of social responsibility based on a notion of the common good rather than individual rights are conceivable.

In its journey from the free market to the social market British politics has just landed at the airport. A band of hopeful politicians, uncertain, bearing lots of luggage from the past are looking around for a guide. It is a sort of political package tour. Some want to go back to where they have just come from (No Turning Back Group), while some don't approve of holidays anyway (Campaign Group). There are the neatly dressed with their phrase books keen to make a good impression on foreigners (John Major and Chris Patten). There are others who realised some time ago that, like it or not, the social market package tour was the only way of getting to their destination – power (Neil Kinnock, the soft Left and most of the Labour Party). They are not that keen on the holiday but are convinced there is a jolly good booze-up waiting at the end. None of them are really prepared for what is awaiting them on the rest of their journey but they have little option but to continue upon it.●

Charlie Leadbeater is the industrial editor of the Financial Times.

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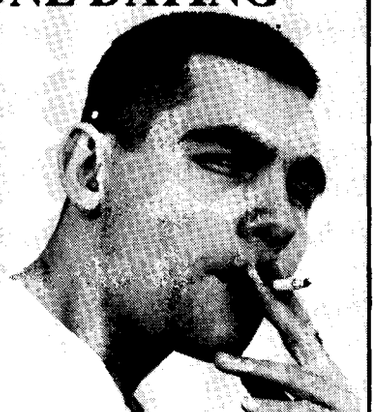

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A STRATEGY TO END TORY RULE

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The Powers That Buy

Consider the following propositions:
Consumer power is one of the most potent social forces of our time.
The responsibility of the company will be one of the great issues of the 90s.
Unlikely? Absurd?
Richard Adams and **Sean Hamil** explain why

Burton's offer rainforest t-shirts, Next a green cotton range, BP go to extraordinary lengths to conserve Poole harbour, and British Nuclear Fuels take one of the largest stands at this year's Green Show. The supermarket chains are devoting valuable shelf space to 'environmentally friendly' products and even British Aerospace, through its Royal Ordnance subsidiary, has announced the green sportsman's dream; a biodegradable cartridge with non-toxic shot.

Can this be indicative of a seachange in popular opinion? British Aerospace, for example, is notoriously impervious to public criticism. Remember their hosting of General Pinochet's visit to Britain in May and their arms sales in the Middle East? But behind the incongruity of their environmentally friendly duckshoot lies the hint of a response to social concerns. It's worth looking further.

As is so often the case the advertising industry has been the first to identify the full commercial possibilities of the green shift in consumer opinion. Dorothy Mackenzie of Dragon International, the agency which has done most to highlight these trends, now sees a further stage emerging. A strong bottom line is no longer divorced from good corporate citizenship. 'Relating corporate social responsibility more closely to business goals is likely to lead to higher and more focused expenditure generating a greater return to the companies involved.'[1] The talk now is of corporate reputation influencing brand loyalty. Reputation, which in the past was seen to be based on quality and reliability, now draws in issues with wider frames of reference.

Agencies continue to package and promote the caring 90s. The degree of public environmental friendliness being shown by some of our biggest companies is verging on the indecent. Green marketing and corporate image advertising which stresses a company's good record of social responsibility abounds. ICI's recent campaign,'World Problems, World Solutions, World Class' which linked their products with the curbing of infectious diseases in the Third World – 'People shouldn't have to choose between dying of thirst and dying from cholera' – is just one example.

The driving force behind the recognition of corporate responsibility as value-added is a growing awareness by the public that their quality of life can be indirectly and adversely affected by their purchase decisions. It is the prospect of this opinion being translated into changing purchasing patterns, or pressure for government legislation, which has launched corporate Britain into the current spate of self-justification on the environmentally benign nature of its activities. This is a key point, for it indicates that business recognises a new breed of consumers who are not content to leave the social and environmental regulation of producers solely to legislators and public bureaucracies. The new consumer seeks to use the market to change the market, through their own purchasing decisions.

The demise of the CFC-driven aerosol spray is the classic example of consumer pressure in action. Here was a product with a range of convenient and practical applications, which by 1988, was being rejected by consumers because of its wider environmental impact on the planet. What makes this case all the more revealing is that Johnson Wax, one of the UK's biggest aerosol manufacturers, unilaterally phased out CFCs in 1976 because of the potential threat – and no one noticed. Public awareness of the issue had not reached critical mass. This positive action was to pay off handsomely for Johnson 10 years later, almost putting their environmental credentials beyond reproach.

This new awareness is now being reflected in a range of other consumer campaigns, trends and boycotts. Only one large cosmetics manufacturer (L'Oréal) now continues with animal testing related to these products. No major retail chain sells fur, and there are now 20 'socially screened' unit trusts managing £300m of individual investor's money. A growing number of consumers are using information on corporate social responsibility issues in their purchase decisions. In Holland commercial brands of coffee are now available carrying a Third World development seal of approval endorsed by an independent foundation. This seal guarantees a better deal for producers, because the price paid to them is tied to growing costs rather than the world market.

At present this means small farmers in Central America are getting 30% more through this scheme, courtesy of the Dutch consumer. In less than two years £30m of sales have been notched up, with people willing to pay the premium prices involved because they can track the benefit back to individual growers. The market mechanism is being used to derive a directly ethically inspired benefit, just by being made to respond to consumer preferences.

For the thinking consumer it is no longer sufficient to talk about 'healthy' food. It also has to be safe, cruelty free, fair and sustainably produced. Consumers are linking their purchasing choices with an 'investment' benefit. Not only are they asking what will the product do for them or say about them, but now they are asking what impact its production and consumption will have on the future of the planet. The connection between individual consumption and wider consequences is now firmly established. The new consumerism is much more creative than its conventional counterpart because it views consumption as more than an isolated act by the individual at the end of the economic process, affecting only the person concerned. Rather, it sees consumption as part of a holistic process in which there are negative as well as positive social and environmental feedbacks which cannot be viewed in isolation, and which

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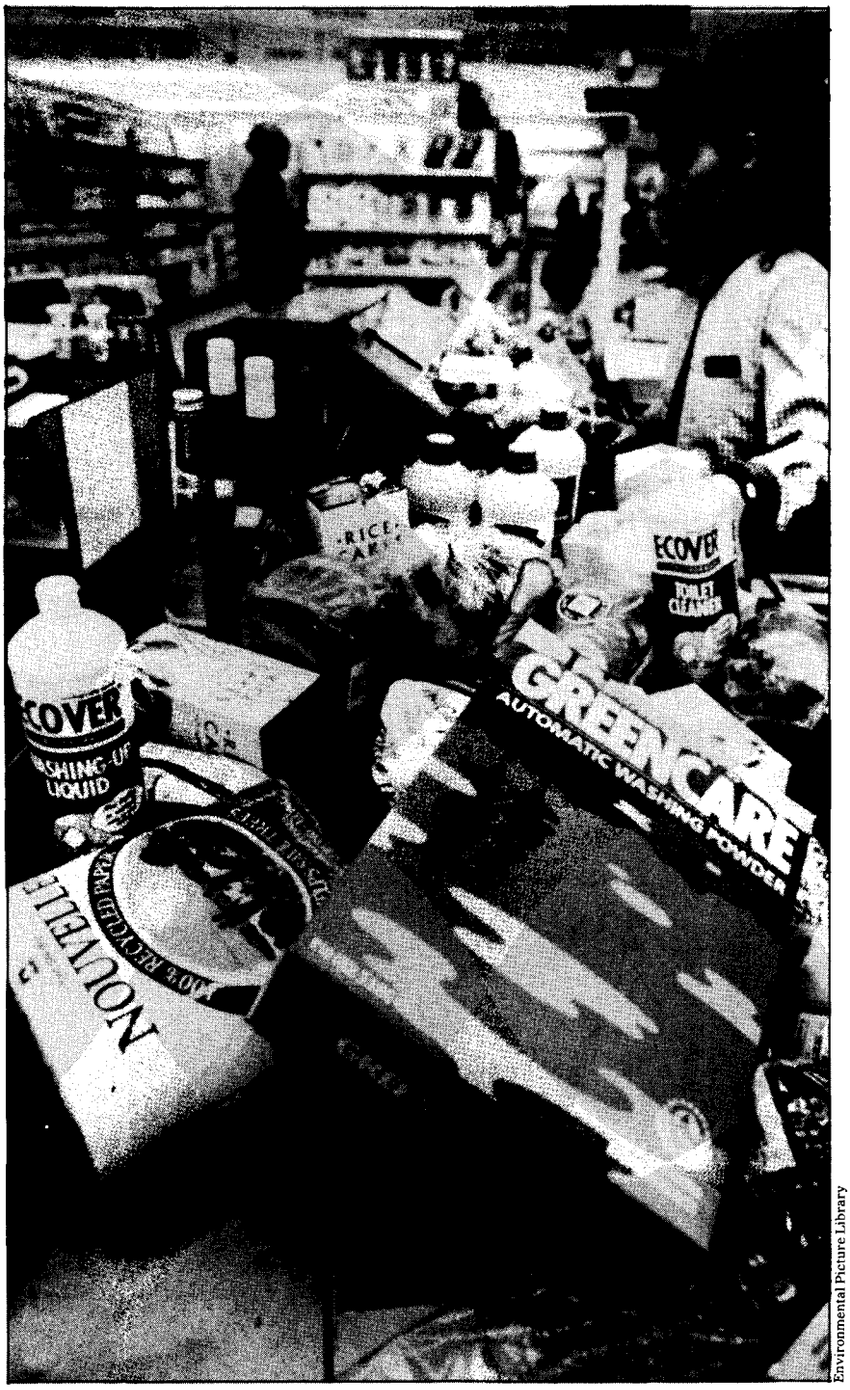

Environmental Picture Library

have an impact on individual consumers via their impact on the community as a whole. We may enjoy eating a hamburger, but do we feel this justifies destroying rainforest to provide grazing land for beef cattle? We have been made aware of the personal tragedy of indigenous peoples and the universal threat of global warming.

Consciousness-raising has been on the agenda of the campaigning groups for two decades. But now the aggressive, anti-pollution, anti-consumption advertising of Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the Green Party, pin-pricks in terms of media-spend, has been joined by the de-radicalised images of the mainstream consumer goods companies, all seeking to portray a deeper shade of green. For example, can there be anyone seeing the recent British Gas 'outdoor kitchen' commercial who is not attracted by the sheer quality of the natural images? The principle of 'the polluter pays' is already at work, as far as image reconstruction goes. This may seem superficial, indeed it often is pure presentation without substance, but it is reinforcing the shaky foundation of concern for the environment that the pressure groups began building in the mid-60s.

So the powerful institutions that shape consumer preference are now underwriting some of the milder green ideas. Do they realise how subversive this might be? We are more aware of the global dimension, we have literally seen our world from out there, a fragile ball of matter, a closed system, spaceship Earth. And something is festering in this closed community. The ozone layer erosion, global warming, pollution and rain-forest depletion; population growth, desertification, famine, Aids, debt, and the first dramatic and tragic instance of a resources war. And now we have the threat of balkanisation and nationalism in eastern Europe. How does this last one link with our theme? Change in the east is being driven by consumerist, materialistic demands... 'we want what the West has got... and we don't just mean freedom'. Just as the Second World discovers the principle, 'I shop therefore I am', the very process by which we in the West have become affluent is being questioned by those who have been made affluent, and questioned at its deepest level. Can we go on like this? Is it sustainable? Is not the whole system flawed and ultimately self-destructive? If we are worried about the impact of a consumerist Second World, what happens when the Third World starts to follow our course?

Enter the new consumerism, asking questions about sustainability. Does the product fulfil a want or need? What social costs are incurred? When attached to the traditional consumer values of price, reliability, quality and safety, the new consumerism transcends the didactic moralising still found in its green roots. It becomes active and creative, in contrast to the passive and destructive image of consumption when viewed simply as the end of the economic process. New consumerism effectively demands that not only should producers provide effective goods and services at a reasonable direct cost, but that they are also produced in a socially responsible fashion. The market system must deliver the economic goods to the individual within the context of achieving social goals for the community at large; a social market.

'The new consumer seeks to use the market to change the market, through their own purchasing decisions'

Although the new consumerism is as yet a minority interest, it is a clear trend. To date its impact has been most clearly expressed over the environment but already this is broadening into equal opportunities and personnel issues. By some this drift is seen as extremely threatening:

'Few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundations of our free society as the acceptance by corporate officials of a social responsibility other than to make as much money as possible for their stockholders.' Milton Friedman.[2]

'The fighting spirit should have priority, and not this ethical and social drivel that is so fashionable. What is important is a truly competitive attitude, whereby people really try to attack the opposition and put better products on the market.' Helmut Maucher, chief executive, Nestlé.[3]

To be fair to Maucher, Nestlé indicated to us when we discussed his statement with them that he was not against including social and ethical issues in company policy but that it was a matter of getting the proportions right. However, clearly he envisages the proportion as quite small. Nestlé has fought its corner long and hard over the marketing in the Third World of breast

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milk substitutes and infant foods whose safe preparation depends on both clean water and literacy. The company remains the subject of a long-running international boycott campaign. It is operating in a competitive business and many of its less well-known rivals use more aggressive sales methods. But Nestlé's tenacity in staying in this market demonstrates that for this company, as for many others, the principle is not just profit but the continuance of a market where social criteria are not to be allowed to become dominant.

Essentially, the anxiety expressed by Friedman and Maucher rests on the belief that if companies are forced to directly apply social criteria to the corporate strategy process this will hinder their ability to operate as effective profit-maximisers by blurring organisational objectives. This in turn will then undermine society's ability to finance increased social provision. If true this is a fatal criticism implying as it does that such interference with the market mechanism will inevitably kill the goose that lays the golden egg: corporate profit. The irony is that the incorporation of social criteria in the corporate strategy process is entirely consistent with the neo-classical market theory so dear to the critics of the social market.

By seeking to put a value on the social costs and benefits of the economic process it is possible to make a more realistic analysis of the true benefit to society of the production of a particular good. Too often business chooses to treat as a free good inputs on which it is not forced to put a financial value. The environment is the classic example. As long as the environmental impact of business activity goes unquantified, even in terms of the financial costs of cleaning up afterwards, the wider social and environmental consequences can be ignored. Effectively this means treating it as a free good. Of course the reality is that it is far from free, and as is always the case, there comes a time when the cost of such production becomes explicit. Someone then has to pick up the tab and repair the damage. Returning to the CFC issue, it is consumers as a whole, and not just the consumers of CFC-based products, who are paying in terms of wider exposure to potentially cancer causing agents. This in turn has financial costs in terms of greater healthcare charges. Producers themselves are now having to pay for the financial cost of finding a workable replacement for CFCs. In the case of the infant formula example it is the children in the Third World whose mothers do not follow the instructions on the tin who pay the hidden social cost implicit in a company's decision to market infant formula using criteria based largely on financial return.

Unfortunately, dealing with these social and environmental externalities to the free-market model after the damage has been done is considerably more expensive than if a thorough environmental cost/benefit analysis had been carried out at the initial product development stage. However, this requires a degree of long-term planning and investment, a consequent acceptance of limitations on the ability to deliver short-term profit, and an acknowledgement of a wider social responsibility, which appears to frighten many business people, politicians and economists. They remain fundamentally wedded to an approach to policy development which seeks to minimise any constraints on the making of short-term profit. This approach, which prioritises short-term profit over long-term investment, has long had the upper hand in British industry. A successful Hanson bid for ICI would be the apotheosis of this trend. However, the widespread concern that the bid has aroused indicates that even in the heart of the industrial establishment there are influential voices who feel that the wider public interest cannot be ignored.

'The principle of the polluter pays is already at work as far as image reconstruction goes'

The international business community is only gradually emerging from a narrow view of their responsibilities to society. It was only sustainable as long as other groups in society carried the cost for the wider social impact of their business activity. The costs fall widely; on the taxpayer, communities affected by pollution in the vicinity of their plants, or citizens of other countries who work in low-cost conditions which would be unacceptable in the industrialised nations. Far from hindering wealth creation, the incorporation of social criteria into the corporate decision-making process actually assists it by making explicit the real costs and benefits of economic activity.

As we mentioned at the outset, consumer power is beginning to play an important part in placing specific social issues on the corporate agenda. However, the future success of this emerging movement is threatened by the ability of industry to restrict and distort information on their true level of social responsibility. We need to know many things about a company's social policies to form an opinion, yet it is still the practice of most corporations to assume that most information is commercially sensitive until proved otherwise.

The law doesn't help much. Companies are required to inform their shareholders about their financial position. But business is increasingly being required to acknowledge that there are other stakeholders in the business to whom it has a responsibility; its employees, its customers and the community at large. The legal requirements for reporting to these groups on issues that concern them are minimal. Many annual reports contain just one sentence each on matters such as consulting employees, health, safety and welfare at work, and provision of equal opportunities for disabled persons. The salary of the highest paid employee is required as is a listing of the number of employees earning over £30,000 per annum. This, together with a note about directors' share interests, and political and charitable gifts, is all the law demands.

Social disclosure is important. The top 100 consumer goods companies operating in Britain absorb 30% of our entire disposable income and between them have sales which exceed £1000 billion, worldwide. Their products are bought or used everyday by the majority of UK consumers. Many have argued that collecting social data or determining general social policy guidelines at corporate headquarters was not a priority or was too difficult.[4] Any company which admitted that it was unable to collect financial information in the same way would see an immediate slump in share price. During the 1980s local government, public services, publicly-owned enterprises and the trade union movement were all forced to provide greater accountability to their stakeholders through legislation. Yet the business sector was allowed to continue without further statutory demands. The pressure of recession is now forcing business itself to place corporate governance on the agenda. Just what is the role of non-executive directors; should the pool from which they are selected be widened to represent all stakeholder groups? The refreshingly awkward Sir John Harvey Jones expanded on this theme of corporate governance in the 1991 Grand Metropolitan Annual Report, obtaining a whole page to do so.

On the bulk of social and environmental matters there is an informational black hole. Consumers are not told about, and therefore do not know, which goods are environmentally 'costing the earth', nor are they aware which companies are committed to policies of sustainable economic growth and social responsibility. Their choices do not, therefore, reflect their preferences on these matters, and the market registers erroneous signals of approval for polluters and exploiters. To use market terms, an inefficient allocation of resources and a sub-optimal level of social welfare are the inevitable results.[5]

It takes a huge upswell in public opinion to counter the entrenched lobbying power which the vested interests of producer power wield. This task is made even more difficult when companies are not bound to disclose information on the full impact of their activities. Without full information consumers' organisations have problems raising issues of concern with government which they believe require legislation. For the social market to operate effectively the true costs and benefits of the production and consumption process must be made explicit. The provision of information on the social costs and benefits of the production and consumption of goods and services therefore represents the second arm of the social market alongside direct government regulation. In legislative terms it demands at the very least the introduction of a Free-

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dom of Information Act, and a formal social accounting report to be published by companies in conjunction with financial accounts.

In the current absence of significant social and environmental reporting legislation it is up to consumer and pressure groups to gather such information and bring it to the attention of the public. The majority of the UK's largest consumer companies have indicated that they recognise the trend by co-operating with recent surveys in this area.[6] Unilever, for example, stated that it devoted 'nearly 150 hours of managers' time (in response to a social responsibility survey) not including the time of clerical staff devoted to checking sources'. Perhaps they are aware of what is happening on the other side of the Atlantic. Fund managers in the US now direct $500 billion that is invested according to socially screened criteria, both negative and positive. Corporations now vie with each other to demonstrate the size of their minority purchasing programme (giving preference to sourcing supplies from businesses owned by ethnic minorities). Company-sponsored upward mobility committees to promote women in to management are becoming common. Nearly a million copies have been sold of the paperback, *Shopping For A Better World*, which 'rates the corporate winners and sinners' across issues such as charitable giving, equal opportunities, family benefits, South Africa, community outreach and the environment.

'The public in Britain are beginning to appreciate that the vital issues of the next century will revolve around the nature of global consumption and distribution'

The public in Britain are beginning to appreciate that the vital issues of the next century will revolve around the nature of global consumption and distribution. Fundamental choices will have to be made about lifestyle, patterns of production and consumer priorities. Decisions which will shape our social structure must be based on extensive and wide-ranging information about the nature of our consumer society and those who service it. The social market has arrived. Is this over-inflating the power of the socially aware consumer? Spending patterns argue otherwise. The limits to consumer power have yet to be seriously explored. A small number of large companies dominate the consumer goods market. Where economies of scale are vital, a small shift in consumer preference may turn a healthy profit into a serious loss. In 1990 we spent £340 billion on consumer goods and services. In the same year we gave away about £1.7 billion to charity, a graphic demonstration that positive consumer action can dwarf conventional methods of supporting social change or action.

But the social market will only emerge if supported by an informed, dynamic and more radicalised consumer movement with sustainability and social justice as its prime objective. It is part of a process of convergence, of establishing an all-embracing public and private sector ethos. It will be strengthened and enabled by legislation which enforces corporate accountability to stakeholders through far-reaching disclosure provisions on social and environmental issues and on internal matters like expenditure on training, labour turnover, pension provision and industrial democracy. The social consequences of business decisions can be ignored only as long as other stakeholders pay the price. This is unfair, inefficient and not sustainable. Just as the Third World is chopping down the rainforest to pay off short-term debt, so many businesses over-exploit social capital for short-term gain. The costs of this approach must be made explicit. Then consumers can start to make real choices in their long-term interest.●

Richard Adams is director of New Consumer, the public interest research organisation.
Sean Hamil is a researcher with New Consumer.

1 *Corporate Reputation: Does The Consumer Care?* A research study by Dragon International into the effect of corporate reputation on consumer purchasing decisions.
2 Friedman, 1962, in Rob Gray, Dave Owen and Keith Maunders, *Corporate Social Reporting: Accounting And Accountability*, Prentice/Hall 1987.
3 *Manager Magazine*, issue 4, 1990.
4 Adams, Carruthers and Hamil, *Changing Corporate Values*, Kogan Page, 1991, pp5-8.
5 Paul Ekins, *Sustainable Consumerism, A New Consumerism; Theoretical Basis And Practical Application*, The New Economics Foundation/New Consumer 1989.
6 New Consumer social responsibility surveys, October 1989 to March 1991.

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Europe's Tax Exiles

Both Labour and Tories now promise a much improved welfare state. But how, **Bob Rowthorn** asks, can we achieve a European-style welfare state with an American level of taxation?

In the run up to the general election, the level of public spending and taxation will be a highly contentious issue. Labour will be accusing the government of deliberately starving the public sector of funds so as to pave the way for further privatisation and tax cuts. The Tories will reply by arguing that their policies will make the public sector far more efficient, providing sufficient savings both to improve the quality of services and finance tax cuts at some unspecified future date. At the same time, they will attack Labour for its supposedly grandiose spending plans and accuse the party of having a hidden agenda for huge tax increases. Labour in turn will defend itself by promising that tax rates for the bulk of the population will not be raised, and that its modest spending plans will be financed largely from the revenue generated by future economic growth – the so called 'growth dividend'. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats will be on the sidelines denouncing the other parties for either callousness or wishful thinking.

The various sides in the debate on government spending are by now well dug in, the air is full of charge and countercharge, and potential voters are already being assailed by the usual barrage of half-truths, bogus claims and misleading statistics – 'more real resources than ever before being spent on health and education', etc. As the election approaches things can only get worse. This is not to say that all sides are equally to blame. The opposition justifiably have the government on the defensive, and whatever weaknesses there are on the Labour side are dwarfed by the dishonesty of the Tory campaign. However, my purpose here is not to apportion blame, but merely to describe briefly the historical and international background against which the present debate on government spending should be located.

In 1969 the UK had the third highest ratio of government spending to GDP in the Western world, being surpassed only by the Netherlands and Sweden (see fig 1). We now have one of the lowest ratios in the whole of Europe and the government accounts for a lower share of total spending in the UK than in any other country in the European Community. Of all Western countries, the UK is the only one where government expenditure in relation to GDP has actually fallen since 1969. In every other Western country the government share of total spending has risen massively over this period.

The picture is similar if we look at taxes and other kinds of government revenue. The share of government revenue in GDP in the UK is now much the same as it was 20 years ago, whilst in most other countries there has been a substantial increase. At one time Britain was one of the most highly taxed of all OECD countries. This situation has changed dramatically, and the overall tax burden in the UK is now well below that of most comparable European countries. If tax rates in the UK were set at the German level, the government here would have an extra £20 billion every year to spend. With French tax rates the figure would be £40 billion, and with Dutch or Scandinavian tax rates the additional revenue would be in the range £60-80 billion.

A striking feature of Tory tax policies has been the huge cut in taxes on upper incomes. When the Thatcher government took office, tax rates at the top end of the scale were among the highest in the Western world. Now they are among the lowest (fig 2). Among the Western countries in the OECD group, 19 have a top rate of personal income tax significantly higher than in the UK, while Portugal has the same top rate of 40% as we do. Only in the USA, Iceland and New Zealand do the well-off pay a lower marginal rate of income tax than here. Most notable, perhaps, is the case of Japan, where the top rate is 65%. If suggested here, such a rate of tax would be condemned by the Tories and many economists as a 'crushing' burden on initiative and hardwork. Even many on the Labour side would agree with them. Strangely, it does not seem to inhibit the Japanese, whose economic dynamism is the envy of British politicians and economists alike. Compared to the Japanese example, Labour's proposal to raise the top rate to 50% looks rather modest. It is sometimes argued that other European countries can afford high levels of government expenditure because they are rich. The UK, on the other hand, is rather poor and cannot presently afford such lavish expenditures. Maybe one day, when we are as rich as the continentals, we too shall have the resources to finance their kind of welfare state. This argument is not supported by the evidence. Contrary to popular opinion, Britain is a comparatively rich country, even by European standards. According to the latest OECD statistics, GDP per capita in this country is now greater than in Austria, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands, and is only marginally less than in Denmark or France. It is only a few percentage points below that of West Germany and probably exceeds that of the newly unified Germany (fig 3). All of these countries have levels of government expenditure well in excess of the UK. And in most of them, taxes absorb a much greater share of GDP than is the case in Britain.

The contrast between the welfare state in Britain and continental Europe is clearly not the result of Britain's poverty, but of politics. It is the outcome of a deliberate policy of the Thatcher regime to hold down government spending and reduce taxes during the 1980s – at a time when the market sector of the economy was growing rapidly in the course of a prolonged economic recovery from 1981 onwards. Government spending was held down in a variety of ways. Employment in the education sector was reduced; some growth was allowed in employment in the health service, but much less than required; the pay of many government employees was increased, but by less than their equivalents in the market sector of the economy; public sector investment was severely curtailed in areas like housing, schools and railways. Finally, and most important of all in financial terms, the link between social security benefits and average earnings was broken. The real value of benefits was maintained by upgrading them in line with the retail price index, but no provision was made to match the very large increases in real earnings which most workers in employment were getting. The result was the relative, if not absolute, impoverishment of many benefit recipients. In the case of child benefit, the policy was even more severe and it was not even uprated in line with inflation. Even after the recent increase in child benefit announced by the new 'caring' government of John Major, it would require an average increase of 66% to restore the *relative*

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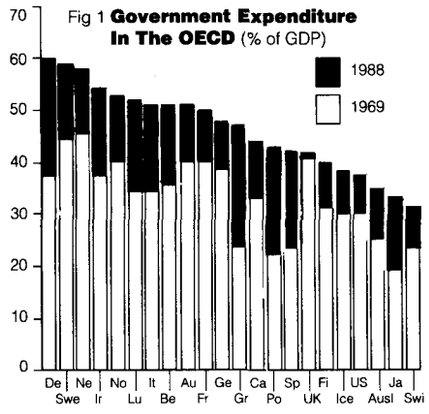

Fig 1 **Government Expenditure In The OECD** (% of GDP)

Source: OECD, Economic Outlook.

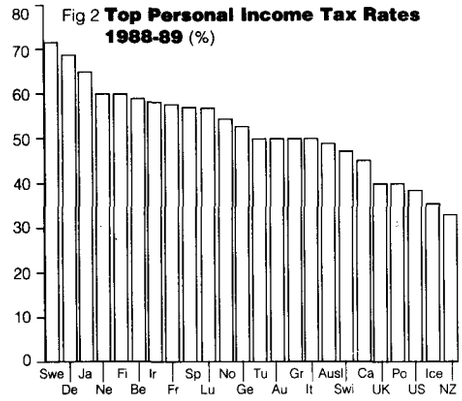

Fig 2 **Top Personal Income Tax Rates 1988-89** (%)

Source: OECD, Economies in Transition. Includes state and local income tax.

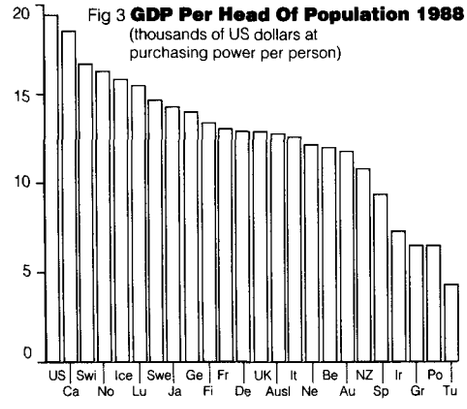

Fig 3 **GDP Per Head Of Population 1988** (thousands of US dollars at purchasing power per person)

Source: OECD, National Accounts.

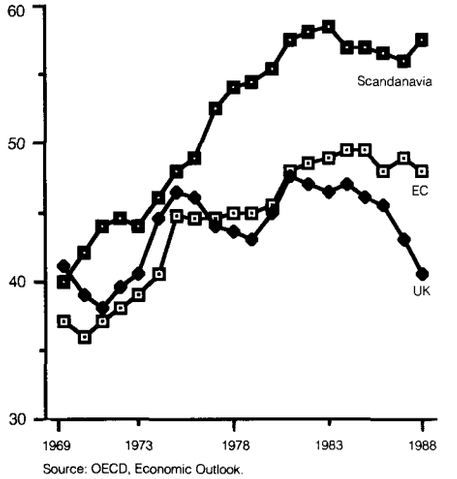

Fig 4 **Government Expenditure In Europe** (% of GDP)

Source: OECD, Economic Outlook.

value of this benefit back to its 1979 level (as compared to average earnings). Through these various measures the Thatcher government saved over 20 billion a year in public expenditure and provided most of the finance required to cut taxes. They also raised additional money by selling off nationalised industries and other government assets.

The reduction in taxes undertaken by the Thatcher government from the mid-1980s onwards was not forced on it by overwhelming political pressures, but reflected its own ideological predilections. Given the 25% or so rise in average real earnings which occurred during this period, there was absolutely no need to reduce the overall tax burden. On the contrary, it would have been relatively painless, and politically quite feasible, to gradually increase this burden, thereby generating the funds required to support a European-style welfare state. In the event, for its own ideological reasons, the Thatcher government did just the opposite. The result was remarkable. In the early 1980s, the share of public expenditure in GDP was much the same in Britain as in the average country in the European Community (fig 4). Within the space of just a few years, this share has been dramatically reduced and a wide gap has now appeared between the UK and the rest of the Community. The fact that Britain currently has the lowest share of public expenditure in the Community is thus a very recent phenomenon.

'When the Thatcher government took office, tax rates at the top end of the scale were among the highest in the Western world. Now they are among the lowest'

Given the long-term process of social and economic convergence which is occurring in western Europe, this gap is unlikely to be permanent. It seems inevitable that political and economic pressures will eventually force the UK to upgrade its welfare state to the European norm, and this will require a significant rise in the share of taxes in national income. When and how such a transformation will occur is a matter of speculation, suffice to say that the process will not be easy. Neither of the two major parties is at present willing to advocate significant tax increases, and it will require a considerable change in the intellectual climate before they do so. The Tories are currently promising to combine a European-style welfare state with American-style tax rates, which is clearly impossible. With current tax rates the simmering crisis in the British welfare state will continue indefinitely, while if the Tories cut taxes still further the result will be disaster. For its part, mainly for electoral reasons, Labour decided some time ago to accept the broad outlines of the Thatcher tax reforms, and its proposals for change in this area are marginal. Whatever the wisdom of this decision, the party has made its bed and for the time being must lie on it. Despite the merits of the case, it would be electoral suicide for Labour to switch policies at this stage and start advocating a significant rise in taxation. If Labour wins the election, its leaders will be very reluctant to go back on their promise and actually implement such a rise.

It is conceivable that events beyond its control might leave a future Labour government with little option but to execute a U-turn and raise taxes. Eco-nomic prospects for the next few years are grim and unemployment is likely to reach 3m in the fairly near future, and remain very high for some years to come. Such a situation would severely strain the finances of a Labour government by reducing the number of tax-payers and requiring additional expenditure on unemployment-related benefits. The obvious solution would be to borrow heavily, but this might force up interest rates and exacerbate an already bleak economic situation. With adequate borrowing ruled out, Labour would face a stark choice between unpopular tax increases or unpopular cuts in public spending. Under these conditions, it might well choose to raise taxes. This would initally be an emergency measure, but once taxes were raised, it is unlikely they would ever be brought down again under a Labour government. Thus, a crisis-induced rise in taxes might provide a way out of the present impasse which makes it taboo for Labour to support the kind of tax increases that any rational supporter of the welfare state can see are necessary.

These comments apply specifically to a Labour government, but a Tory government might face similar pressures. Whatever government is in office after the next election, it is likely to face harsh financial constraints and may be confronted with a choice between cutting spending or raising taxes. A Tory government would be more inclined to spending cuts than Labour, but the political cost of substantial cuts might be so high that even for the Tories increased taxes might be a preferable alternative. Such a move may seem inconceivable now, but the examples of Bush and Kohl indicate that events can force even the most reluctant leaders in this direction.

This is only speculation, of course, and events may turn out quite differently after the election. But no matter what the immediate future holds, it is likely that political opinion at home, together with the wider pressures of European integration, will eventually force improvements in the welfare state which can only be financed by increased taxes. The debate will then be, not whether taxes should be increased, but in what form these increases should implemented and on whose shoulders the burden should fall.●

Bob Rowthorn is professor of economics at Cambridge University.

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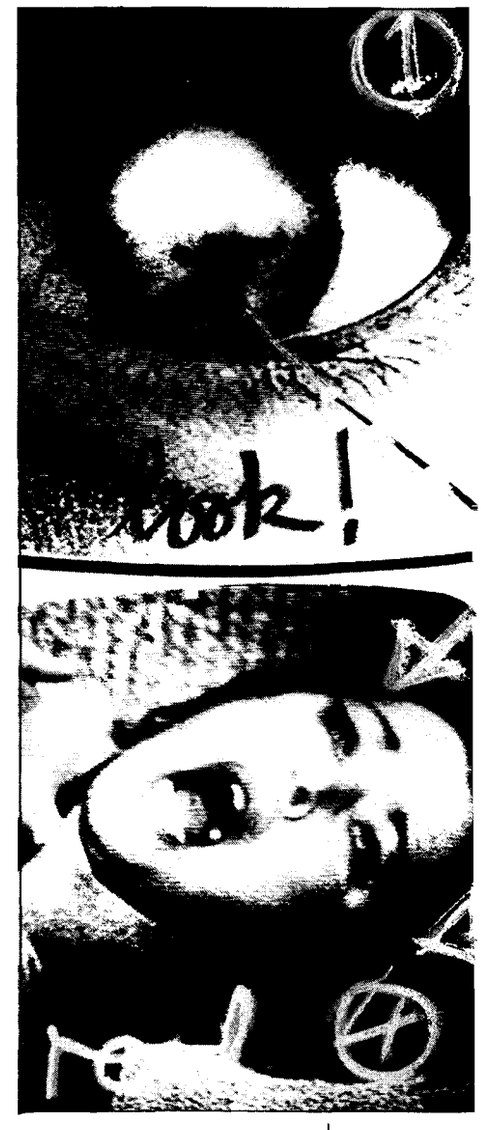
View To A Kill

From the Gulf war to serial killer films, 1991 has confronted us with violent images. **Kevin Robins** questions the morality of our screen-gazing world



What if we run the tape back and replay the Gulf war after *American Psycho*? What could this tell us about violence in Western culture?

Not so long ago – though it now seems an age – we were watching the Gulf war being played out on our screens. We were spooked by devilish images of Saddam Hussein, the 'new Hitler'. It was an epic media event where the Good, armed with their high-tech weapons, went in to 'take apart' the Evil Empire. We did not see it, but we came to know that more than 150,000 Iraqi soldiers and civilians were slaughtered in that bloody kill.

Now, just a few months later, we are gripped by another kind of slaughter. The media have turned to the phenomenon of serial killing in American cities. It is said that there are between 30 and 40 mass killers at large, and their potential victims are flocking into movie houses to be shocked and haunted by knowing it. Now it is the monstrous image of Hannibal Lecter that stares out at us.

We can use the serial killing phenomenon to reframe the symbolic value of the war. From the 'deep black' of outer space, American spy satellites maintained a constant surveillance over the Iraqi nation. Stealth fighters 'lurked' in the Gulf skies, and then death came suddenly through the 'surgical strike' of a cruise missile. These 'smart' or 'brilliant' weapons allowed the allied forces to 'remove' chosen targets at will; and death came out of the night, from killers who could see through darkness.

Disturbingly, something like this reality has now seemed to come home to overshadow the populations of American cities. In the serial killer genre, it is the American citizen who has come under surveillance, watched by the psychotic killer lurking stealthily in the urban night. The deadly penetrative stare of Hannibal Lecter, characterised by his brilliance, has become the motif of the genre. We cannot hide from the serial killer. We too have now become a 'bounty of targets'.

Of course, this shift in agendas could be utterly fortuitous. Maybe the search for novelty and spectacle in the media is simply a random process. But, then again, perhaps there is more to it. The affinity is compelling. In their juxtaposition, these two media phenomena reflect something important about violence in our culture, and, particularly, about the screening of violence (in both senses of that term). Together they also tell us much about what film director Jonathan Demme describes as the condition of 'moral disenfranchisement' that characterises 'Bush's soulless America'.

In an essay on the Gulf war (*The Nation*, March 11, 1991) Lloyd deMause, an American psycho-historian, suggests that, prior to the conflict, America had been experiencing feelings of guilt, depression and sinfulness. He describes this condition as a 'shared emotional disorder'. DeMause makes the apparently strange observation that it was child abuse that provided the 'symbolic focus' for the crisis. For some time before the conflict, he points out, the drama between the Terrifying Parent and the Hurt Child had been haunting the American psyche. What the Gulf war offered was the possibility for America to rediscover its moral purpose and emotional wholeness.

For a moment, a brief moment, this epic spectacle sustained a sense of national integrity and moral regeneration. For this moment, the role of the Terrifying Parent could be projected outwards onto Saddam Hussein, the 'child molester', and George Bush could assume the identity of the Good Parent. The subsequent media event, the screening of serial killers, has now reintroduced an element of anxiety and dislocation into the national (and the Western) psyche, retrospectively and insidiously poisoning the heroic image of the just war. Now, when we rewind the tape, the war looks different.

The Gulf war was to purify America by exorcising an evil which was projected as being outside ('in a desolate Middle Eastern desert'). What becomes clear in the horror genre is the fear and anxiety that evil is really within. And, strangely, it is again the drama of the Terrifying Parent and the Hurt Child that is the symbolic focus of this anxiety. In *Twin Peaks*, Leland Palmer is the demonic murderer and rapist of his own daughter. In *The Silence Of The Lambs*, the cannibalistic Lecter symbolically becomes the bad father of the detective, Clarice Starling. In John McNaughton's *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, the psychopathic Henry murders the prostitute mother who abused his childhood. Terrifying Parent and Hurt Child are caught in a vicious cycle of mutual destruction. But this time the destructive force cannot be projected outwards.

This creates a sense of impending dissolution and moral disintegration. The serial killer could be anyone, the man next door, the next Henry or Jack or Norman that you have the misfortune to come across. The fictional Henry is driven by combined feelings of euphoria and dissociation: he kills because it makes him 'feel better'. We saw this in the Gulf war too. Think of the Apache pilot returning from his mission: 'When we got back, I sat there on the wing, and I was laughing... I lay there in bed and said OK, I'm tired, I've got to get to sleep. And then I'd think about sneaking up there and blowing this up, blowing that up.'

How do we learn to live with this violence? To ask this question is to consider the mechanisms through which we manage to screen our-

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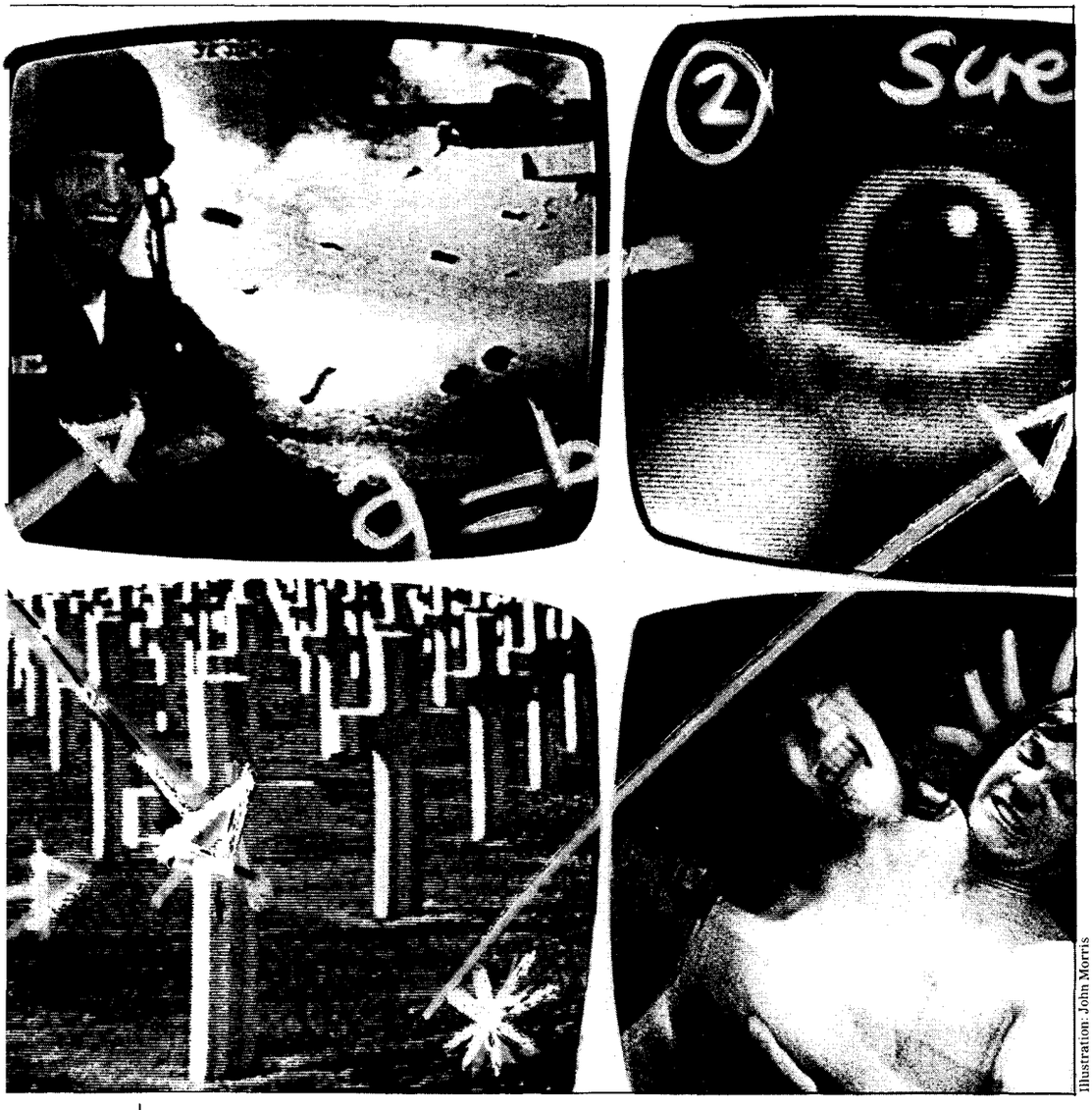

Illustration: John Morris

selves from 'evil'. What is fundamental in both of the examples I have been discussing is that our exposure to violence has been through the mediation of the screen. Both were media events. The screen is a powerful metaphor for our times: it symbolises how we now exist in the world. Increasingly we confront moral issues through the screen, and the screen confronts us with increasing numbers of moral dilemmas. At the same time, however, it is through the screen that we disavow or deny our human implication in moral realities.

I do not mean to say that this is intrinsically or necessarily the case. Of course, we have all looked at images of suffering (in Vietnam, South Africa, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Kurdistan – the list could be frighteningly without end), and we have felt moral responsibility. But images do present particular difficulties for our moral being. 'To suffer is one thing', writes Susan Sontag, 'another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate.' Yet through the distancing force of images, frozen registrations of remote calamities, we have learned to manage our relationship to suffering. The photographic image does not, and cannot, of itself, implicate us in the real and reciprocal relations necessary to sustain moral and compassionate existence. And with video screens and electronic images, this moral chasm has been made wider. As we have become exposed to, and assaulted by, images of violence on a scale never before known, we have also become more insulated from the realities. It may no longer be a question of whether this strengthens conscience and compassion, but of whether it is actually undermining and eroding it.

If we are to come to terms with this moral condition, we must consider the nature of our engagement with screen culture. To do this, I want to focus on two episodes, one from each of the media events I have been discussing. The first is the report from the Gulf war, which I have already referred to, of Apache helicopter pilots video-recording their slaughter through cameras equipped with night-vision sights. After the carnage, the pilots returned to base to watch the footage: 'War hardened soldiers hold their breath as Iraqi soldiers, as big as football players on the television screen, run with nowhere to hide.' 'A guy came up to me', says one participant, '... and he said: By God, I thought we had shot into a damn farm. It looked like somebody opened the sheep pen.'

The second episode I want to focus on is from *Henry: Portrait Of A Serial Killer*. In this film, Henry and his infantile friend, Otis, have stolen a video camera, and this is then used to video-record themselves torturing and slaughtering a suburban family. Afterwards, they sit back to watch a replay of their murderous and sadistic acts. 'I want to see it again', says Otis, who likes the video so much that he eventually falls asleep in front of it.

The similarity of the two episodes is disturbing. What they dramatically emphasise is how peculiar the relationship actually is between the act of killing and the act of watching people being slaughtered. In both examples, the killers are, at the same time, the video-makers. And as sadism turns into voyeurism it somehow neutralises itself; in each case it screens out the actual reality of the killing, and it distances the killers from moral engagement. How is this possible?

In the case of Henry and Otis, we know that this is because their behaviour is psychotic. Here the question of moral responsibility is least problematical, and we are concerned with the criminal pathology of the serial killer. But what of the Apache pilots? How was it possible for them to screen out the reality of violence that they had unleashed and apparently dissociate themselves from the moral implications? And what is it that allows us to still call their behaviour 'normal'? It is clearly the case that the pilots could mobilise strategies to achieve moral distance

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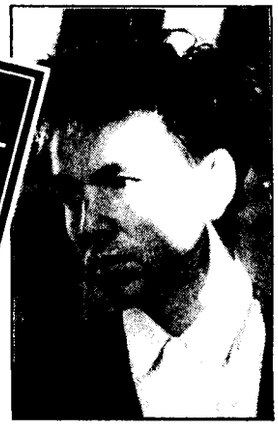

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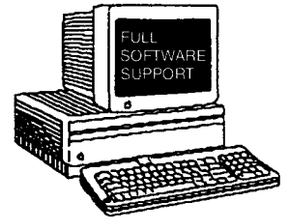

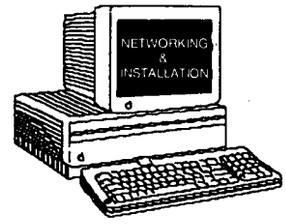

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from the brutal and brutalising activities in which they were engaged. Through the defensive mechanisms of denial, disavowal and repression, they could preserve and protect a certain sanity within an insanely violent environment.

One of the most powerful defensive strategies is the mechanism whereby people come to 'split off' from their normal consciousness the part of themselves that acts violently, and then to disown it. In his book, *The Genocidal Mentality*, the American psychologist Robert Jay Lifton describes how this mechanism worked in the most violent of all environments, the Auschwitz death camp. Lifton uses the term 'doubling' to describe how an element of the self can come to function autonomously and antithetically to the prior self. The individual involved in violence 'perceived that the institution wanted him to bring forth a self that could adapt to killing without feeling himself a murderer. In that sense, doubling became not just an individual enterprise but a shared pyschological process.' It is through this mechanism of fragmenting the self, that individuals can manage to co-exist as both killers and apparently normal persons.

This process may be particularly important for understanding our implication in screen violence. By its very nature the screen separates the action that is viewed from the actor-spectator who is viewing. Thus we can describe the Apache pilots in terms of a splitting process that differentiates a 'spectator-self' from an 'actor-self'. In the context of the war, it became possible for them to feel that the spectator-self was more 'real' than the self that was devastatingly acting in and on the real world. This was partly because the array of communications and surveillance technologies in which they were immersed, produced a kind of video-game scenario: it was a push-button, remote-control, screen-gazing war. The effect of these distance technologies was to create a numbed experience of derealised and disembodied combat.

There was a sense of omnipotence and euphoria as the boundaries between reality and fantasy became disturbed. The moral engagement of the actor-self in the reality of combat could be disavowed. Subsequently replaying the video pictures of horror served as yet another distancing device. What the screen did was to amplify and legitimate the sense of omnipotence and power over that enemy. The screen was the only contact point with the enemy other, but what we must recognise is that, in reality, it was no contact point at all for moral engagement.

So, what of us? What of the rest of us screen-gazers, watchers, viewers and voyeurs? Where are we in all of this? At this point, you may baulk; you may feel that the comparisons are being overstated. And, of course, I would have to agree in part. The behaviour of television and movie audiences is different from that of the Apache pilots and of Henry and Otis. The individuals who make up these audiences are only spectators, not actors. It seems appropriate to describe their behaviour as normal, and it would seem strange to describe them as sadistic. The elements of difference are fairly clear. And yet, I would argue, the pathological still casts its shadow over the normal.

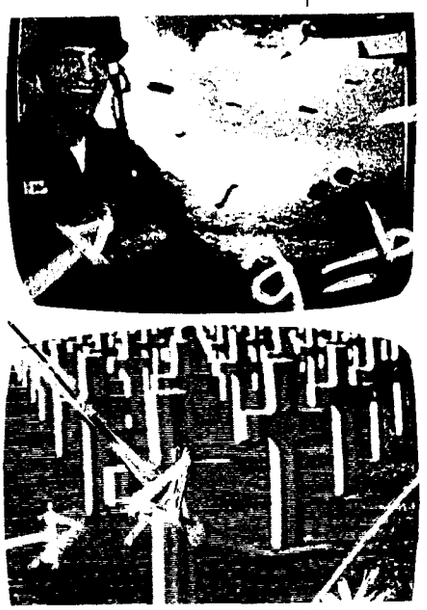
To the ordinary audience member, the screen affords access to experiences beyond the ordinary. It gives knowledge of the unfamiliar and the extreme, the foreign and the fantastic, the aberrant and the frightening. In this respect, the screen has the potential to extend and amplify human awareness and sensibility. And, of course, this can be liberating. But it can also be very problematical. 'Experience and awareness for what?' we might ask. What does it mean to be 'fascinated' by a missile-eye perspective on death? What does it mean to become quickly 'bored' by pictures of slaughter and suffering? What does it mean then to turn to horror movies to satisfy a 'need to be terrified'? The spectator-self roves almost at random from one visual sensation to the next. A cruising voyeur.

The screen exposes the ordinary viewer to harsh realities, but it screens out the harshness of those realities. It has a certain moral weightlessness. It grants sensation without demanding responsibility. This clearly satisfies certain needs or desires. Through its capacity to project frightening and threatening experiences, we can say that the screen provides a space in which to master anxiety. It allows us to rehearse our fantasies of omnipotence to overcome this anxiety.

In the serial killer genre, this rehearsal may be about containing fears about our own destructiveness. In the case of the Gulf war, the threat was (projected as being) from outside, and the screen was mobilised to construct a collective sense of omnipotence over an alien 'monster'. In their different ways, both of these media events of 1991 have been about imagined threats to civilised norms and values, and about the imaginary exorcism of those threats. In the domain of the screen, it is possible to contain the anxieties that cannot be confronted in their reality.

Moral identity and responsibility can only come from our recognition of, and engagement with, the refractoriness of the real world. It must necessarily involve us in processes of dialogue and negotiation, processes in which self and other are mutually transforming and transformed. The kind of screen event I have been describing is not characterised by such reciprocity. The screen bypasses the intractable nature of reality; it seems to put us in control of the world. This is not to say that those who watch screens are not guided by moral concerns. It is, rather, to say that the act of screen-gazing may make their moral behaviour more difficult. The screen displaces, rather than supplements, reality; it does not involve us in the processes of dialogue and negotiation.

There are those (following Jean Baudrillard) who like to tell us that the screen has now eclipsed reality; that we are living in a world of image, simulation and spectacle. For these people, this disembodied world of screen ecstacy is an aesthetic domain, no longer a moral one. There is, perhaps, something suggestive in this observation. But before we become too seduced by this postmodernist scenario, we should remember the 150,000 *real* men and women who were *really* slaughtered beyond the screening of the Gulf war. We should consider the implications of the fact that there is a symbiotic relationship between fictional serial killers and real ones.



It is not that we now live in the realm of the image. It is that there is, in our culture now, a kind of collective, social mechanism of 'splitting'. The spectator-self is morally disengaged, floating about in an ocean of violent images. The actor-self is caught up in reality whose violence is often morally overwhelming. How can we come to terms with this situation whereby the spectator and the actor seem to be going their separate ways?●

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Martin Kettle on the opera revolution

Booming Voices

Remember the 1980s? In Britain they were the decade of Thatcherism and of opera. But what about the 90s? With Thatcherism out for the count, does opera have a future? The question is not as facetious as it seems. Opera in Britain became hugely fashionable after 1979. Opera houses rediscovered their role as cultural temples for the rich and fashionable. The loadsamoney set moved in. Corporate sponsorship took root. The captains of Thatcherite industry clambered onto the boards and Mrs T herself, notoriously uninterested in the arts in other respects, could even be seen in the Royal Box at Covent Garden more often than was strictly necessary.

Superficially, the attractions of the analogy have also been strengthened ever since Thatcherism began to unravel. Just when ferocious possessive individualism has been going out of style in politics, so Britain's opera houses have been wracked by crisis too, as operatic boom turns to operatic bust. Covent Garden and English National Opera (ENO) have both faced financial problems as sponsorship slowed and box-office takings were hit by the recession. Welsh National Opera nearly closed. Kent Opera actually did. Many of the top jobs in the opera houses are currently unfilled. There is a whiff of drift and even disintegration in the air.

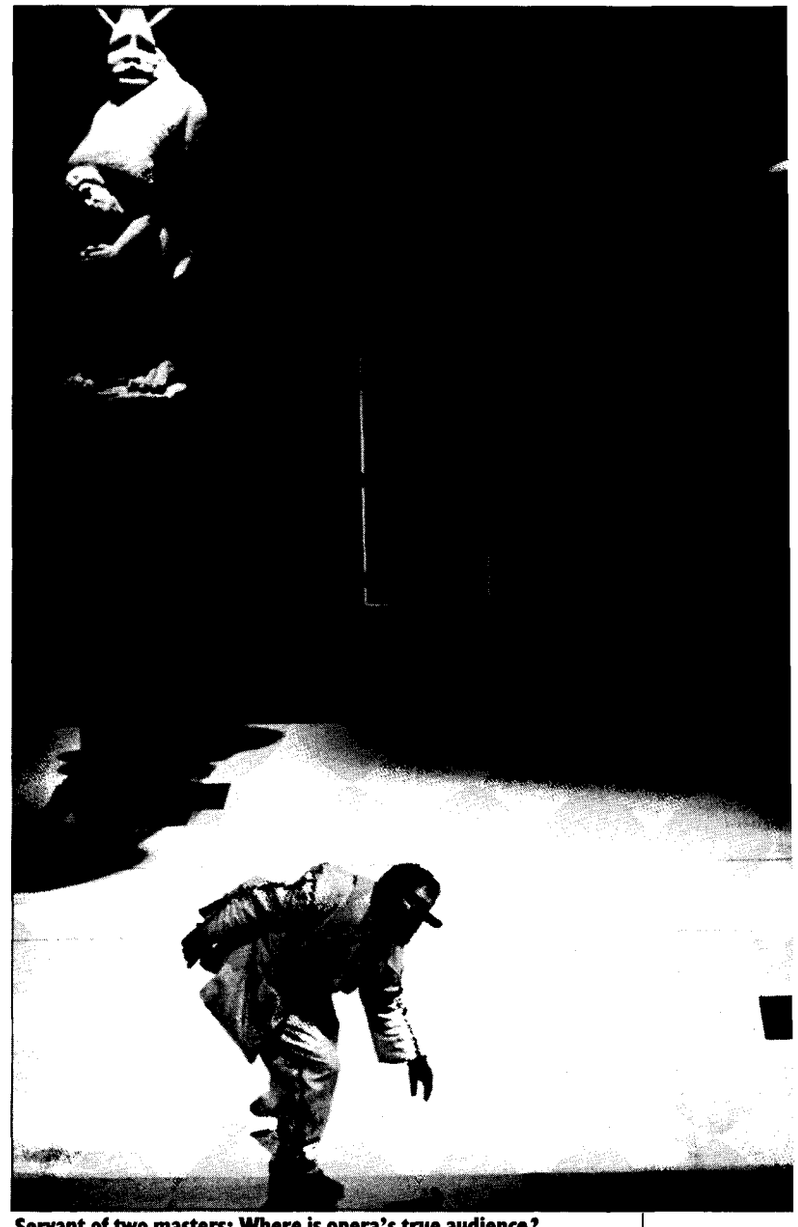
Most of the people who write about opera encounter it most often in the opera house. That makes them untypical of the opera public. It also means that disproportionate journalistic attention is focused on the things that happen in the houses. The Faustian compact between the Covent Garden management and the corporate sponsors, the radical artistic policies of ENO or the occasional shock tactics of the new regime at Glyndebourne have all been frequently documented. All are interesting, yet none of them is a particularly new development. There have always been rich slobs at the opera, and sometimes radical stagings too.

The real opera revolution has occurred in the sitting room. In this sense, the boom did not merely coincide with Thatcherism, it was also massively facilitated by it. New technology and new marketing have between them made opera simply more popular and more interesting than it has ever been before. Lots of different factors lie behind this change. But the 1980s mass entrepreneurial approach to the arts has been a decisive element. This breaking down of barriers is exemplified in opera by Harvey Goldsmith's Earl's Court productions of *Carmen*, and, this year, of *Tosca*, as well as the autumn *Aida* at the Birmingham NEC. Here the emphasis is on big, spectacular shows modelled on rock concerts and aimed at an audience unaccustomed to and perhaps intimidated by the opera house.

Above all, though, Thatcherism provided the conditions in which opera could spread by launching a consumer spending boom which put videos and hi-fis into millions of homes, transforming the arena and the conditions in which ordinary people could encounter music theatre.

In every way, the most important modern aspect of the opera boom was its spread out of the opera house through television into the expanding video and compact disc markets, building a vast new audience in the process. There was no one moment when this spread began, but the televising of Leonard Bernstein's 1984 recording sessions of his own *West Side Story*, featuring Kiri te Kanawa and a harassed Jose Carreras, was surely pivotal, as it was certainly intended to be by the Deutsche Gramophon record company.

Boosted by the BBC's coverage, sales of the *West Side Story* recording topped 300,000, establishing te Kanawa and Carreras as household names and pointing the way to the commercial opportunities which are now open to the best opera singers, especially when they come down from the opera house stage and move into the popular repertoire.



Servant of two masters: Where is opera's true audience?

Other singers, notably Luciano Pavarotti and Placido Domingo, have plunged (or been plunged) into the gap opened up by the Bernstein film. Every year now, a major record company invests heavily in an 'opera stars sing Broadway' recording. *Show Boat* and *Kiss Me Kate* are recent examples. The top singers now regularly record 'crossover' albums of everything from Christmas carols to Lloyd Webber. Opera singers have also seized a chunk of the video market, with concert performances and customised video recordings of opera. The process reached its greatest climax in the amazing Carreras/Domingo/Pavarotti concert in Rome during the 1990 World Cup, which has so far sold more than 300,000 video and at least 1.4m audio copies in this country alone.

As a result, the central figures in the opera revolution are not the big name directors, managers or even performers, but the entrepreneurs, makers and distributors of opera videos and recordings. You only have to see the extent of the shelf

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space now devoted to Pavarotti and the rest in the big high street chain stores like WH Smith to see that here, rather than Covent Garden, is the focus of the action. Even in the recession, the selling power of the great tenors is awesome, just as, on a different scale, Caruso's or McCormack's were 60 years ago. The other day in an English provincial Our Price I saw two different video versions on sale, each for less than £20, of Giordano's *Andrea Chenier*, a riproaring opera which few people in this country can ever have heard or seen but which people are apparently now willing to buy and watch at home simply because Domingo is in it. Pavarotti's free concert in Hyde Park this month, with its echoes of the Rolling Stones' concert of 1968, is another striking embodiment of the huge change.

It is important to recognise that what goes on in the opera houses is fairly peripheral to all these developments. Pavarotti and the rest have become hugely wealthy international superstars in spite of being opera singers as well as because of it. The recording boom has certainly had knock-on effects in the international opera houses. It has been one factor in sustaining the audience at Covent Garden in spite of the recession. The attraction of the superstars is reflected in the confidence with which Covent Garden can now charge stratospheric prices (a top price of more than £200 a seat for Pavarotti or Domingo in the 1991-92 season) and be assured of not pricing itself out of the market.

It has increasingly begun to dominate the way that big houses arrange their schedules. 20 years ago, an important opera house would mount its new productions on its own. Today, new productions are invariably shared between the big houses and are mounted as package deals involving television and video rights.

Yet the opera establishment tends to regard many of these popularising activities as something quite separate from their own activity. Not without reason. Their own agenda remains very different, no less valid in its own way, but much more modest in its public impact. They are much more interested in the re-examination of the standard repertoire by interventionist directors and in the exploration of largely untried obscure and new repertoire.

A company like ENO, for instance, may aim in theory for the widest possible audience through its many estimable projects and initiatives and by encouraging an admirably unstuffy atmosphere. In practice, however, it seems nevertheless only to reach what is still a middle-class educated audience.

This year's experience at ENO exemplifies the difficulty. The company committed itself to an all 20th-century season, for which it rightly received great acclaim from people who like modern music and modernist productions. The trouble was that not enough of the public fall into that category. The season has been an artistic success but a financial failure. Measured against the continuing boom in recordings, the implications for opera as a live performance art are disturbing.

But then, in reality, the opera boom is about two very different audiences. It has been about the marginal expansion (and sometimes contraction) of the established opera-house-going audience on the one hand, and the massive expansion of the new domestic listening and viewing audience on the other. The former is in crisis, looking for a valid independent role; the latter has hardly even begun to exert its potential. The two know little about one another and the immediate likelihood of their converging seems small. Indeed, the seeds of future confrontation, in which the needs of the mass market will undoubtedly call the shots, are very clearly visible in the casting policies of the international houses. In opera at least, the post-Thatcher era is anything but classless.●

Elizabeth Wilson on the return of urban art

City Vision

The city and its spectacle has been one of the most important subjects for Western painters, at least since the Renaissance, but the 'painters of modern life' of the 19th century made the urban scene the centre of their works in a new way, seeking to find a different and disturbing beauty in the smoke and crowds of the industrialised city.

In the interesting, beautifully-written catalogue that accompanies the Barbican exhibition, *The Subjective City* **(June 29 – July 29) Oliver Bevan points out that the dominance of modernism and abstract painting in the early 20th century meant that the photographer replaced the painter as the chronicler of the then contemporary city. Only with the post-modern turning away from abstraction has the city once again become a subject for painters.**

Now, though, there is possibly even greater ambivalence, questioning and selfconsciouness than appeared in the work of, for example, the painters of the Weimar Republic, the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, (the 'new sobriety'). In the 1920s, painters such as Otto Dix drew a horrific picture of the extremes of wealth and poverty, the vice and degradation of Berlin, whereas, although the earlier painters of Paris – from Manet to Toulouse Lautrec – had shown the seamy side of their city, the effect of their paintings is much more celebratory.

Both attitudes seem to come together in the present exhibition. *The Subjective City* **catalogue echoes the negative attitude towards urban life that has become, regrettably, a kind of cliche of Western culture. Terry Bennett's opening introduction in particular refers to the *meaninglessness* of the contemporary city and the greed and ambition to which commercial buildings, 'great slabs of concrete', testify. Oliver Bevan, William Packer and Timothy Hyman write more enthusiastically, aware of our contradictory responses to the intensity of the city experience.**

The paintings themselves, referred to by Packer as 'contemporary expressionism', hark back to a golden age of figurative painting. Without being derivative, Paul Butler's 'Archway Tavern' has an echo of Edward Hopper; George Thompson's 'View Over Dalston Lane' has the febrile feel of a Munch, yet there is no feeling of pastiche or nostalgia, rather it feels as if the city has become once more a feasible point of departure for the artist, as if we have got past the post-modern dogma that the city is *meaningless*, and found ways of humanising it again.

Oliver Bevan's richly coloured canvasses of an underpass and roundabout cityscape, that looks remarkably like the Elephant and Castle, make us see these long, bleak vistas afresh in exciting colour, peopled with mothers and prams, and lonely pedestrians, while the figures in Lucile Montague's 'City Men' and 'Tea Break' capture that urban sense of rush and paranoia as strangers brush shoulders in parks and bars.

'Tea Break' by Lucile Montague

One of the most exhilarating paintings is David Hepher's homage to Piranesi, in which the connection between the modern high rise landscape – the Barbican, for example – and Piaranesi's imagined monuments is made clear. Instead of postmodern depthlessness and ahistoricism, this links past and present, and even the concrete jungle gains in stature and beauty.●

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Loretta Loach on honest relationships

Great Expectations

Relationships, with a capital R, have become another new deity in our modern culture, along with a belief in the spiritual transformation of the self. Fragile and fraught with difficulties, relationships can, in spite of the obstacles, be changed into things of lasting value.

On a wander around a large London bookshop recently, I counted over 50 titles on one shelf, each offering ways to 'true' intimacy and understanding in relationships. Among the most recent of these modern gospels is the one from the marriage guidance experts, Relate. According to the blurb, the *Relate Guide To Better Relationships* offers 'practical ways to make your love last... a step by step guide which shows couples how they can overcome their differences'.

The Relate book is probably better than most though, in part, it has a certain glibness common to most of these do-it-yourself guides: 'Working through problems', it says, 'gives strength and flexibility and allows you to trust in (love's) power to unite you'. There is the same inexhaustible optimism too; a crisis, for example, can 'prove how good you are at coping or it can force you to find new ways to cope'. It never seems to prove that you simply can't cope at all!

In Freud's day, sexuality was the prism through which the clamourings of broken relationships were interpreted. Today the talking cure is used more literally, since the perceived problem of modern relationships is that couples don't talk enough. Whereas, says Relate, 'When you start communicating honestly and openly every aspect of your relationship can develop and improve'. Spokeswoman Zelda West Meades believes that communication, or lack of it, is the key problem underlying all others in relationships whether it be infidelity, jealousy or just bad sex. These problems can best be overcome by 'talking and listening to one another'.

But if talking can bring such benefits, why do thousands of us so tenaciously avoid it? David Smail, clinical psychologist and author of a book on anxiety and its meaning, says: 'To keep track of the truth of what is passing between oneself and others is both intensely threatening and very complex... the other person can, with a single act of bad faith, betray the reciprocity of this process and send you spinning like a deflated balloon into the distant, sterile reaches of isolation'.

In reality, the path to self-disclosure is not easy. Yes, it can be liberating and exciting, but it can also be terrifying, involving a huge labyrinth of emotions which books like this never signpost. It's not so much that they overestimate the importance of communication, but that they underrate our complex motivation, our potential for goodness and growth on the one hand and ordinary malevolence and destructiveness on the other.

I read somewhere of a man disappointed by love. He was open, honest, trying bravely to resist the slide into deception – 'endangering one's heart', I think he called it. But, he whimpered: 'the minute I started loving her properly and being really considerate, she turned around and got bored, claustrophobic, and she dumped me'.

Another person's vulnerability can arouse hostility and fear, not always compassion and understanding, as is hoped. This may seem unjust (why do the books tell us to be open when experience tells us to be tough?) and communication expresses our rage and disappointment at such a reaction. But it can also become a tyranny, a way of bludgeoning another person to react in the manner we so desperately desire.

In adults, there is always something of the child who expects its pleas to move others to do what we want. Communication can unwittingly become part of this tyranny. Armed with our guides to successful relationships, we can batter our partners with the truth; a truth which, as the philosopher Nietzsche told us, is closely allied to the will to dominate. As a device to change another person's behaviour it may appear gentle, fair, even reasonable, but nonetheless it is coercive.

Relate extols the virtue of communication, yet it seems to me that relationships suffer not so much from a problem of communication but independence; couples haven't so much become disillusioned with the myth of togetherness as anxious about the fear of aloneness.

Relationships have become the emotional bolt-hole for many, the last intimate refuge in a difficult and alienating world. But our view of loving is the same as ever, involving very young desires for parental comfort and security. 'Unconditional love', said Fromm, 'corresponds to one of the deepest longings, not only of the child, but of every human being'.

It's these desires which are so hopelessly incompatible with adult life. In failing to come to terms with this incurable lack, we have relationships which hover constantly on the brink of yearning and disappointment, weighed down with the alternating burdens of expectation or indifference.

It stands to reason that better relationships (not just with lovers but with friends) depend upon a better and more productive relationship with ourselves; we perhaps need to take possession of ourselves in a place of uncomfortable solitude. The trouble is that, having reached such a place, many of us just want to run. At this point we mistakenly seek communication as a way out of our isolation, but if our gesture is misunderstood or unreciprocated, we become furious and afraid.

The mischief or brutality we inflict on one another often results from the frustrations of this loneliness. But there is a limit to what we can expect from another person, possessing, as we do, complex cravings and vulnerabilities so defended that they often lie well beyond the ordinary access of human relatedness.

The hidden and often irresolvable difficulties of the self are absent from the litany of relationship guides. 50 years after Relate was first set up, the problems it encounters have actually increased, so it's not surprising if, as a result of these pressing concerns, they should console themselves with the language of triumphant expectation – that love really will outwit us all in the end.●

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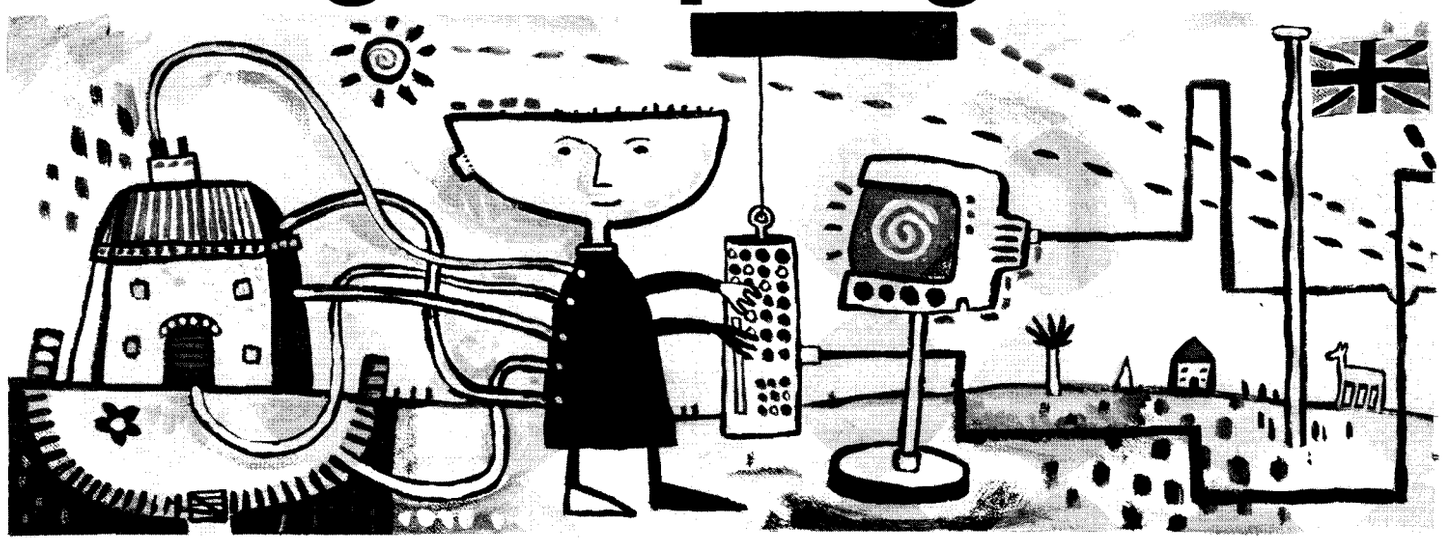
Maureen McNeil looks back on the IT revolution

Heritage Computing



The Science Museum opens its exhibition about Charles Babbage (1791-1871) and his work on July 1. The English mathematican, who designed mechanical calculating engines, is regarded as a founding father in the history of computing. The exhibition centres on the first full-size Babbage engine ever constructed, which has been a major building project for the museum. Doron Swade, curator of computing at the Science Museum comments: 'We have set out to prove that these machines could have worked in Babbage's day'. He describes this as 'a unique opportunity to redeem this great man in time for the 200th anniversary of his birth, and rewrite history in the process'.

The reconstruction of a national technological hero in 1991 could be the occasion to reflect about the larger project of the national route into information technology (IT). There is not much discussion about the IT revolution these days. Has it come and gone? Where has it left Britain? Revolution or not, during the last decade or so IT has become part of our daily lives: in home applications including video recorders, and computers for games and other activities; in retail and financial services through cash-points and bar-codes; in our schools, polytechnics, universities and training centres; as well as in word processing and computer-aided manufacturing in offices and factories.

However, quotidian encounters do not fully account for the dissipation of debate about IT. The fact is that in the 1980s IT became the messianic touchstone for a set of wider expectations about regenerating and reconstructing British culture. As I shall outline below, IT was constructed not only as a medium for transforming education and urban blight, but also as a key to conserving British images of cottage production and village lifestyles, family life, and self-made entrepreneurial heroes. What emerged was a sort of cultural overload that made it difficult to disentangle IT from broader ideological goals. Now, in 1991, expectations for the regeneration of a particular kind of national culture through IT have largely faded. This may may make it easier to reconsider IT.

Internationally, the 'information technology revolution' which began in the late 1970s was seen as the dawning of a new age: the harbinger of changes even more dramatic than those associated with the Industrial Revolution. In Britain, this coincided with the cultivation of the belief that economic decline was largely the product of a national culture antipathetic to industrial and technological development. The range of symptoms associated with this resistance to industrialisation became known as 'the British disease'; and against the backdrop of industrial unrest in the 1970s, widespread assumptions about these cultural inadequacies guaranteed a very particular take-up of IT in this country. Far more than other national trajectories, the British route into IT has been charted on cultural and educational terrains involving, on the one hand, adaptation to what were considered to be key components of British heritage, and on the other, fundamental cultural reorientation.

A 1978 BBC Horizon programme,*When The Chips Are Down*, signalled public concern about the economic and social implications of the new 'microelectronics' technology. In particular, it was the spectre of widespread unemployment which haunted public consciousness. But in 1980 a new term cast the spectre in a rather different light: 'information technology' sounded cleaner, more optimistic, more attractive. It highlighted the conceptual nature, rather than the hardware, associated with the innovations. This was not just a vocabulary change, but signalled a more benevolent image of the technology – which could be used to break associations with unemployment and other social evils.

The positive associations of IT were amplified through other vocabulary extensions: the 'sunrise' industries; Britain's 'sunbelt' (the area of the country in which the high-skill end of IT industries were concentrated). This industrial revolution was to banish the images of its predecessor, *the* Industrial Revolution: no big, noisy machines, smokestack industries or Dickensian factories.

IT spawned a linguistic repertoire which was drawn on in the British context not only to cultivate burgeoning optimism about the new technology, but to underscore both the new consumer capitalism and some traditional values. The 'sunbelt' region itself became associated with the cultivation of a distinctive style which embodied the fusion of enterprise and heritage: high-tech work for the (mainly male, white) entrepreneurs during the day; country life with their families in the evenings and at weekends. Alvin Toffler's term 'cottage industry' was a particularly appealing image in heritage and home-owner England. Here was the best of 'old England' incorporated into the world of high-tech: village life-styles, Cambridge traditions, Clive Sinclair and Laura Ashley products. The appeal was not party-specific and the new technology was often seen as promising a restoration of family values, pre-industrial mode. Shirley Williams, for example, welcomed the prospect that, 'Human beings can be made whole again, working and living in the same commun-

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Illustration: Spike Gerrell

ity. Microelectronics offer the opportunity of reuniting the family, and making commuting an obsolete and unnecessary activity'[1].

In fact, the IT world is a domain in which multinational giants dominate. IBM, AT&T and less than a dozen other large corporations spearheaded the IT revolution and realised its profits. The main customers for these large firms are other big corporations, government defence agencies, and only then the general public. Nevertheless the British press in the early 1980s presented a rather different image, with Clive Sinclair appearing as the leader of the IT revolution. His latest 'brain child' was front-page news and his fortunes constituted an intensely capitalistic soap-opera every bit as engaging as *Dallas*. This media coverage of IT entrepreneurs in Britain was an important vehicle for consumer education and the creation of a mass market for certain IT products. By the end of 1983 Britain had the highest number of home compufers per capita of any nation in the world. Clive Sinclair, known as 'Thatcher's favourite entrepreneur', and subsequently Alan Sugar, became myths – the 'great white hopes' for Britain's IT future. Publicly and privately, computers became the dream machines in which British men invested economically and emotionally.

In the early 1980s the Thatcher government invested heavily in public relations around the new technology, with IT Year, an IT travelling show, and a minister with responsibility for IT. The most ambitious goals of reforming British culture emerged in the field of education. Britain placed far more emphasis than most other nations on IT within education, and IT became a key medium for the reorientation of the whole educational system around industry. What was distinctive about IT's role in this general transformation was that it gave it a sense of urgency and national mission, whilst proclaiming it as inevitable, or, at least, value-neutral. The concern with computer literacy helped to push the burden of Britain's position in the IT world simultaneously onto the backs of educationalists and individual citizens: it became the duty of these people to make Britain technologically competitive and to stop thereby the process of economic decline. While IT was centre-stage – during a period of major cuts in many of the transformations at all levels of training and education – a few projects became flagships of the Conservative cultural revolution. ITECs (Information Technology Education Centres), science parks and city technical colleges invoked new technology as the solution to social problems and the key to urban regeneration.

In 1986, a new, abridged edition of Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* (1859) appeared, with an introduction by Mrs Thatcher's deputy, Sir Keith Joseph. In its original version, Smiles' bible of entrepreneurialism was a belated attempt to counteract the impact of the cultural critics of the Industrial Revolution, and to celebrate the achievements of industrial heroes. Joseph's edition was a timely reminder that the Conservative government was determined to win the cultural terrain in the new technological revolution. It also indicated that the Thatcherite revolution was about the amalgamation of modernisation with specific features of Britain's heritage. Britain's entrepreneurs were to be men orientated towards the future, but also steeped in clearly British traditions.

Sinclair and Sugar became prototypes of the popular capitalism the Thatcher governments pioneered. Their stories were mythical tales of private investment, risk taking, concern for the national interest and reward. The invitation for such involvement in the nation's economy was extended in the calls from 1982 onwards for investors in privatisation programmes. Likewise, the image of these innovators provided a positive gloss on the IT revolution. The products which Sinclair and Sugar marketed were modest items, appropriate to the general Conservative-sponsored trend of private consumption. Once again, IT took on a cottagey feel in Britain, thereby banishing its associations with powerful multinationals like IBM, or big military applications.

The Babbage exhibition opens after a period in which Britain has traversed a very peculiar route to IT. Those who visit the exhibition will have cause to reflect on the British heritage in IT, but also to consider its future prospects in this country. In 1991 Britain is in the midst of a new recession, which threatens the green and pleasant south (as well as the north), and small businesses, including Laura Ashley. Sir Clive is now a figure of the past. The expectations that IT would be the vehicle for urban regeneration, for resurgence of the traditional nuclear family, or of cottage industries and village lifestyles, have faded. The abandonment of much of this cultural baggage could clear the way for reassessments of IT. Of course, the latter is no easy task. The British route so far has shown that rewriting technological history is one thing, but that negotiating the role IT should play in the nation's future is a far bigger project. The Science Museum can make Babbage's machine work, but whether IT can work for Britain remains to be seen.●

1. *A Job To Live: The Impact Of Tomorrow's Technology On Work And Society*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985, p.69.

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Scott Goodfellow delves into the ruins of London

Tales Of The City

If you hear a clatter of bins one morning and a noise that just couldn't be cats, relax. It's probably those nose-in-the-dirt scribblers and scavengers, Iain Sinclair and Patrick Wright.

Here's the scenario: like a chipped cup, the angel of history has been furtively disposed of, replaced by a golem with 'Heritage' on its forehead and 'DTI award for excellence' stamped on its bum. This beast was conjured up by Lady Margaret Thatcher (Wright dedicates his book to her; to Sinclair she is 'the Widow') and it has made its unnatural home in the rubble and architectural pastiche of London's Docklands. Our heroes – Sinclair the novelist narrator and Wright the critic and essayist – are searching for the odds and sodments of a past less tainted by the rule of money. For both, this offers a possibility of redemption, of a new dream of society/community/culture.

Wright and Sincliar aren't just chance acquaintances; as friends and allies, they crop up in each other's books. Wright's comment, on Sinclair's 1975 self-published prose poem *Lud Heat*, that 'history is not just a matter of old relics: it also lies around as morbidly unfinished business, as ghosts and strange potencies that seep around the edges of every reforming design', helps to explain his own philosophy and motives. ('A man from the BBC', remarks Sinclair acidly in **Downriver** (*Paladin, hbk £14.99*), 'is convinced, despite rumours to the contrary, that I'm a figment of Patrick Wright's imagination'.)

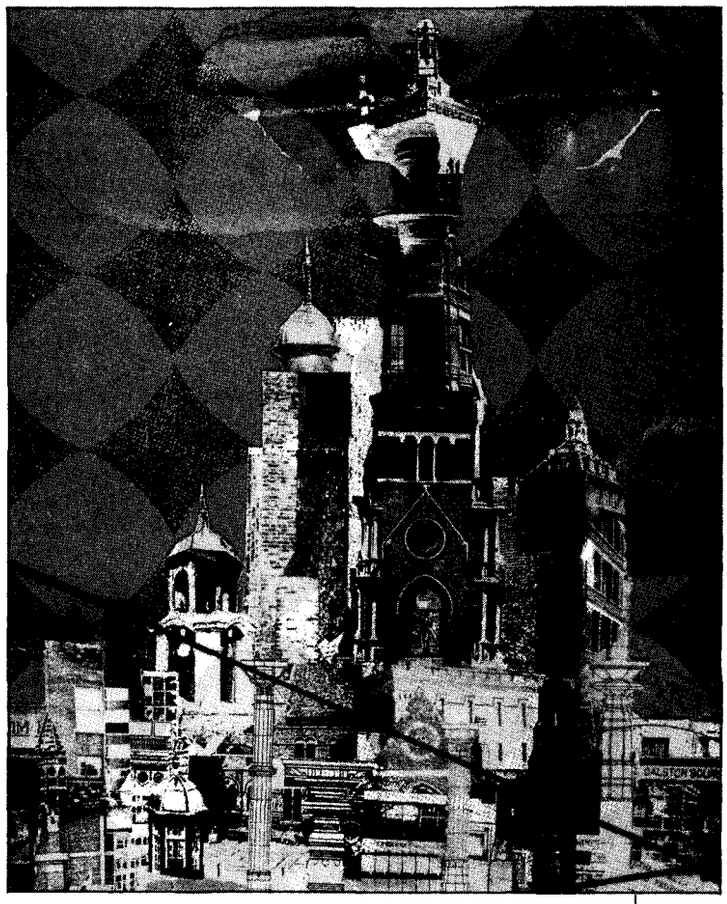
A Journey Through Ruins (*Radius, hbk £16.99*) begins with the murky particular (the vibrant life and decaying economy of Dalston Lane in Hackney, a disappearing synagogue curator, an unbuilt war memorial) and works out to the political and theoretical in a series of dispatches on the failure of postwar housing, yuppies, the National Trust, Prince Charles, and so on.

Wright, whose 1985 book *On Living In An Old Country* virtually began the 'heritage debate', writes with an easy command of his subject and an eye for those crucial details. But sometimes – in his attempt to link the vanishing curator with the middle-class immigrant-restorers of Spitalfields, for instance – they collapse under the weight of their own significance, leaving only an entertaining journalistic account where more was promised.

Despite common obsessions (both curator and memorial are also to be found in *Downriver*), the man from the BBC was wrong. Wright is rarely prescriptive but nevertheless offers a sort of GLC-ish notion of a happy multicultural community – if only we have the right kind of state/community planning. As a former management consultant, corrosive 'potencies' tend to give way to political pragmatism. Sinclair, bookdealer and poet of an unhealthy apocalypse, has no such qualms.

Where Wright concludes with a sympathetic account of Prince Charles' dream of a renaissance city of the future, Sinclair offers us a medieval vision of the city as a living organism, now diseased and decayed but still powerful. His densely adjectival prose, as full of references as an Augustan poet and delivered with the velocity of Ben Elton, takes us on 12 linked journeys through a strangely altered East London in a search for the symbols of power – Wright's morbidly unfinished business – that will throw down the Widow's vision.

'This whole book is a sleep of revenge', Sinclair tells his friend Joblard in a letter. The dream of reason produces monsters: the monsters of Canary Wharf are thrown down by the monsters of Sinclair's imaginings. The Isle of Dogs becomes the Isle of Doges, bought out by the Vatican. Theo Crosby's unspeakable Battle of Britain monument (in reality never built) is erected as a monument to Dennis Thatcher, and then destroyed by the Wicker Man, conjured from pre-Christian mythology by the sculptor and snail poet Imar O'Hagan.



Sinclair is also offering a travelogue of real voyages: day trips to Tilbury, where Dickensian London has merely migrated, not vanished, or to the Monster Doss House, where tramps and mutated dossers dream unspeakable dreams. Alive, if rarely well, the cast of *Downriver* may or may not be significant details. Whichever, it's enough for Sinclair that they could never be part of the Widow's vision.

But ultimately he has to throw away his typewriter and plead with Joblard to finish the book for him. 'I've exploited the darkest of times for comic routines that only flatter and fatten the monster: give it a tongue job.' He feigns depression, an inability to go on. Joblard, an unwilling Sancho Panza, must offer a narrative voice for the last journey outwards to the centre of things.

Perhaps, in the final cricket match, recounted by Joblard and played out on Horse Sands with Pocohantas, a WG Grace impersonator, a circus dwarf and the illusory nurse and prostitute Edith Cadiz, we are teasingly offered a happy ending. 'I don't know if this proves his thesis or destroys it. But the conclusion must be: the sickest team wins.' The sickest team, the unhealthy river, the breath of decay that even now lingers on the half-built towers of Docklands. Time, the great healer, is also, for good and ill, the destroyer. The golem will soon be (is already?) past his sell-by date and then – who knows?

So, at the end of Sinclair's narrative stampede, we are back where we started. Wright subtitles his book *The Last Days Of London*, perhaps presuming a day when there's nothing left to scavenge for, but Sinclair wouldn't dare. His cry must always be: 'Back to the bins!' Like Heraclitus, he never looks in the same one twice.●

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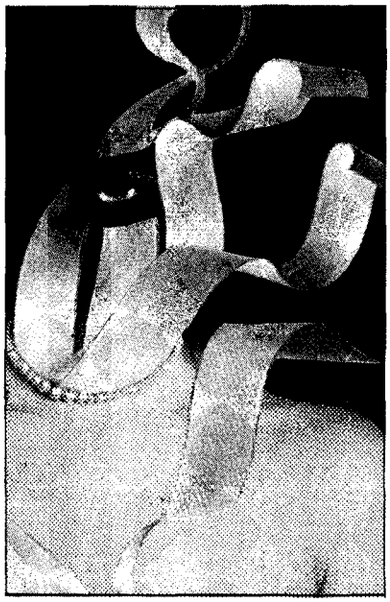
BOOKS

Brian Morton on books of moment

The Immortal Story



Joan Didion once claimed that all novels are so conceived as to be read at a single sitting. That's stretching it a little. Even were it feasible, it's hard to imagine anyone taking *Martin Chuzzlewit* at a swallow; the logic of the text is against it. On the other hand it's clear that there is a particular kind of text that takes all its impetus from a single moment or perception, much as a piece of music derives from a single chord, and is somehow, hopelessly, intended to be grasped with the same immediacy. Hopelessly, because the whole logic of *texts* is against it.

Catch-22 pulls it off because *Catch-22* is very much about the way that text itself thwarts such epiphanies and climaxes; there are an awful lot of one-liners to get through before Snowden spills his guts. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* very nearly pulls it off, because Fowles deliberately swamps his single moment of clarity with a mass of ancillary discourse that conspicuously fails to gloss or decipher it. Didion herself sees a middle-aged woman dressed in a muumuu, crossing a hot street at noon, as the absolute intersection of eternity, and then gets down to talking about fashion.

Handke and Kundera. *Absence* and *Immortality*. Perfect postmodernist pairing and a perfect opportunity to swallow an elephant and then strain at a glittering fly. **Absence** (*Metheun hbk £12.99*) can be read in two hours, but sticks in the gullet with an indigestible brilliance. **Immortality** (*Faber and Faber, hbk £14.99*) should perhaps be nibbled around the edges, but is grasped if at all in a flash before the hefty spine has begun to crack.

Like Fowles and Didion, Kundera centres his fable on a single frozen glimpse of a woman. She is middle-aged, inappropriately dressed, without qualities, but as she parts from her young swimming instructor on a Paris roof-top pool (we have to imagine Kundera standing at some higher elevation, a copy of Musil lying open nearby) she turns with a seductive wave of the arm which seems ageless and in which her whole life is compressed. It isn't the young instructor who is seduced (he giggles into his hand) but Kundera.

Kundera's great subject is the impossibility of unself-consciousness. We all exist in the presence/absence of some unseen watcher whose look (Sartre's *regard*) defines us utterly. This was one of the themes of *The Unbearable Lightness Of Being*, a far more conventionally voyeuristic book, which Kundera clearly insists we regard as a companion volume.

The manipulation of paradox and tautology, which is highly characteristic of postmodern fictions, can be slightly irritating, but it breaks down the normal parameters of metaphor and simile: Kundera has the woman wheezing in the pool 'as an old steam engine was wheezing from the depths of the water (that idyllic sound, now long forgotten, which to those who never knew it can be described in no better way than the wheezing of an old woman breathing in and out by the edge of a pool)'; while Handke has: 'a procession of ants through the sand will have been a procession of ants, the raindrops in the dust will have taken on the incomparable form of raindrops in the dust'.

Kundera doesn't build quite so confidently on Handke's 'foundations of emptiness', where 'we shall simply have seen the metamorphosis of things into what they are', but Handke's subtle use of tenses suggests that they are thinking along similar lines. Things and people are the way we have wanted them.

Immortality somehow only exists in unequal relation; immortality likes to create symbiotic twins, and Kundera's list is characteristic: Marx and Engels, Romeo and Juliet, Laurel and Hardy; all that before describing the famous meeting of Napoleon and Goethe at Erfurt in 1808. Immortality also works retrospectively, not prospectively; Goethe preens as though an uninvented camera lens were trained on him, but Napoleon, the man of action, does not really 'see' him at all. What, then, of a novel and its 'characters'?

Handke's characters give even less indication that they might know they are being watched; yet, paradoxically, they are far more histrionic. They all – the woman, the gambler, the soldier and the old man who transcribes hieroglyphs – have a history, but it is a history that is defined in their increasingly extravagant gestures, not in any psychology or real existence that might lie behind them. Handke does not watch from a height, nor does 'Peter Handke' discuss the progress of his novel as the four (five?) make their strange, almost medieval journey through a countryside of sudden transitions and unfathomable signs. Is 'DIM', carved on a stone and highlighted by the old man, a Mithraic graffito or an anachronistic advertisement for French pantyhose?

Their final resort (in both senses) is as 'idle onlookers' on a terrace dedicated to the satisfaction of immediate desires, but in the shadow of the centuries-long work of a damaged cathedral in the throes of reconstruction. 'So this was what came of trying to get rid of history, individual as well as universal, and escaping into so-called geography?'

If modernism was obsessed with time and the poorer sort of postmodernism with a kind of metaphysical tourism without passports, Handke has managed to show in the tiniest compass that the human presence is absolute, that 'immortality' is not about cathedrals or novels or battles won but the simple gestures that reveal and record, the gestures of a novelist who is not part of his creation.

At the end of *Absence*, the old man takes himself off with his book of symbols and glosses, 'and for a little while all three of us just sat there showing ourselves'.●

Ruth Picardie on avenging angels

Violent Femmes

Violent women are in vogue. Kathy Bates won an Oscar for her performance in *Misery* as an overweight, philistine and multiple child killer (in that order), Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis play two Southern belles with balls who go on a killing spree to symbolise their liberation in Ridley Scott's new film *Thelma And Louise*. The newspapers are full of real-life examples: Vienna's sisterhood of killer nurses, masterminded by the monstrous Waltraud Wagner; alleged serial killer Aileen Wuornos, currently awaiting trial in a Florida prison. And in an eleventh-hour conversion to revolutionary feminism, Michael Winner is set to adapt Helen Zahavi's rape revenge fantasy, *Dirty Weekend*.

Eileen MacDonald's **Shoot The Women First** (*Fourth Estate, hbk £16.99*), a series of interviews with women terrorists, is therefore a timely contribution to the debate. An ex-*Observer* investigative journalist, she has gained access to the most security-conscious terrorist cells, both past and present. The book includes extensive

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Mary Joannou on a war-time whitewash

War Stories

and probably exclusive interviews with 'brainwashed beauty' Kim Hyon Hui, the North Korean agent who blew up Korean Air Flight 858 to discourage the 1988 Olympic Games; Leila Khaled, the Palestinian hijacker who blew up an (empty) TWA plane in 1969; and Baader Meinhof founder-member Astrid Proll, as well as active members of the IRA and Basque separatist movement Eta.

Unfortunately, MacDonald's first-person interviews are constantly interrupted by her A-level theorising about women and violence. 'Men are traditionally seen as having a certain familiarity with violence', she writes. 'Whether as defenders or aggressors, they are expected to know how to fight. Women, by contrast, are associated with nurturing and caring, and still often revered by society as Madonna figures. They are the protectors and givers of life.' There's also some O-level psychology (women who lose a parent at an early age try to find a new family within a terrorist cell) and home-grown moralising. 'She was such an intelligent woman, yet she had wrecked her own life and the lives of countless others', is MacDonald's verdict on reformed Red Brigade activist Susanna Ronconi. 'If she had chosen differently she could have done so much good...' None of which is particularly useful in an analysis of the motivation and status of women working within terrorist organisations, and their relationship to male terrorists. Andreas Baader called all women 'cunts', but women like Astrid Proll still dominated the Red Army Faction.

MacDonald's prose is equally annoying – more Mills & Boon than reportage. 'Her mood suddenly swung from one of bravado to despondency,' is one typical description. 'She buried her head in her arms. For a few seconds there was silence, then she looked up, almost beseechingly. "Oh god, this is getting hard," she groaned.'

When they are allowed to break through, the women's voices are revealing, despite the android rhetoric. 'Our dreams of self-determination did not materialise and there was still oppression,' says one Eta activist. Maybe the poetry got lost in the translation.

Liveliest is Leila Khaled, who blew up Flight 840 wearing an expensive white trouser suit, matching handbag and hat, telling the passengers to 'relax and drink champagne'. Completely eclipsing her (male) co-hijacker, she went on a publicity tour of the Middle East to celebrate her success. It is she who comes closest to proving Astrid Proll's dictum: 'Then, the most fantastic thing in the world was not to be a rock star but a revolutionary'.●

When I was a little girl growing up in London, I remember my father telling us stories about the Cypriot contingent at Dunkirk. I listened spellbound. My mother used to sing a song about brave little Cyprus defeating wicked Mussolini. It took me a long time to realise that Dunkirk was a defeat not a victory, longer to discover that the little island where my parents had come from was not the centre of the allied resistance to fascism, that it was hardly on the map.

Ben Bousquet and Colin Douglas's study of the West Indian women who joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) in the second world war, **West Indian Women At War** (*Lawrence and Wishart pbk £9.99*) will be of use to historians but more so to ethnic groups trying to recover their own stories which have been written out of eurocentric histories. Starting with the powerful pro-slavery West India lobby in parliament, and working through the strikes and anti-colonial uprisings that swept through the Caribbean in the 1930s, Bousquet and Douglas uncover the deeply embedded racist attitudes that West Indian women, who volunteered, encountered. These were to be found not only at the heart of the Third Reich but also among those themselves supposedly fighting the racist ideology of fascism. The conflict between the Colonial and War Office over black recruitment that they bring to light is not a pretty story.

In 1941 Miss L Curtis from Bermuda applied to join the ATS and was accepted subject to passing her medical. There was no legal colour bar in Britain but the War Office, which was responsible for the ATS, operated an unofficial veto on black recruitment and used Jim Crow attitudes within the American services to justify its own racism. It refused outright to accept Curtis and only gave in after a long, acrimonious and, until Bousquet and Douglas's account of it, little publicised battle with the Colonial Office, which feared for morale and stability in the West Indies if the colour bar became known.

Curtis was eventually given a place in 1943 and became one of 100 West Indian women recruits who came to Britain. All the 200 West Indian members of the ATS who were sent to Washington were white. One might ask why any black women wanted to join? 'We were taught that England was our mother country', says Connie Mark, one of eight West Indian veterans interviewed, 'And if your mother had a problem you went to help her'. When Britain went to war it was

natural for women like Connie to view it as their war. They emerge as robust and indefatigable survivors from the racism and sexism that they experienced first-hand in the forces.

West Indian Women At War has been painstakingly put together from documents in the War and Colonial Offices and interviews in Britain and the Caribbean. It ably explores what the second world war meant to some of its non-European participants. It thus provides us with a deeper, richer, understanding of that war and is a welcome antidote to the eurocentrism that reduces it to an engagement between white European powers.●

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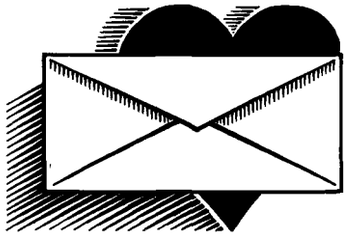

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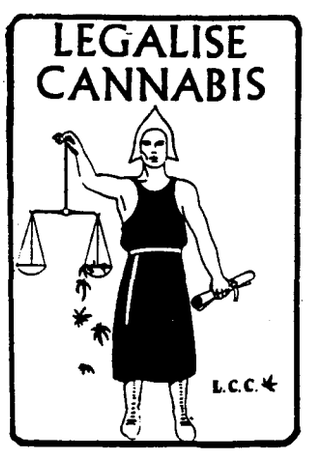

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Typeset
Marxism Today
Spencers
Printed
BPCC, Colchester

ABC
Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations

Published by
Marxism Today Ltd
6-9 Cynthia Street,
London N1 9JF
© World Copyright
July 1991
Marxism Today
ISBN 0026-4118
ISSN 0025-4118
Volume 35 Number 7

Contributors

Beatrix Campbell is a journalist and broadcaster and member of *Marxism Today*'s editorial board.
Geoff Mulgan works for Gordon Brown MP.
Sarah Benton is a writer and lecturer in politics at Birkbeck College, London.
Suzanne Moore is a freelance writer.
Chris Ham is a fellow at the King's Fund College.
John Lloyd is Moscow correspondent for the *Financial Times*.
Charlie Leadbeater is the industrial editor of the *Financial Times*.
Richard Adams is director of New Consumer, the public interest research organisation.
Sean Hamil is a researcher at New Consumer and co-author with Richard Adams and Jane Carruthers of *Changing Corporate Values* (Kogan Page).
Bob Rowthorn is professor of economics at Cambridge University.
Kevin Robins works for the centre for urban and regional development studies, Newcastle University.
Martin Kettle is the editor of the Europe section of *The Guardian*.
Elizabeth Wilson is author of *The Sphinx In The City* (Virago) and professor of social studies at the Polytechnic of North London.
Loretta Loach is working on a programme for the BBC.
Maureen McNeil is senior lecturer in cultural studies at the University of Birmingham.
Scott Goodfellow is a freelance writer.
Brian Morton is co-editor with Pam Collins of *Contemporary Composers* forthcoming from St James' Press.
Ruth Picardie is a freelance writer.
Mary Joannou teaches history part)time for the Cambridge and London extra)mural boards and for the WEA.

Additional contributions:
Legal advice: Jonathan Clay.
Production: Lucy Early, Sarah Furlong, Conrad Gardner, David Herd, Martyn Hudson, Peter McHugh, Jeremy Rolls, Joanna Sumner.
Promotions: Johnny Mundane, Peter Chapman.

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Angela Carter

Angela Carter is best known for her novels and short stories, which explore the iconography of fairy tales and sexual identity with deceptive radicalism, and have won several literary prizes; but she has also published a collection of journalism, *Nothing Sacred*, and a critique of de Sade, *The Sadeian Woman*, in which she re-reads him with unexpectedly feminist results. Her stories *The Company Of Wolves* and *The Magic Toyshop* have both been filmed, and she adapted the former with its director, Neil Jordan. Her first novel in seven years, *Wise Children*, has just been published.

What animal best characterises you, and why? Cats, because of their curiosity.

What is your favourite piece of architecture? The Spanish Steps in Rome, probably – unless that is town planning.

What was your first thought this morning? 'Another bloody day.'

How do you want your children to resemble you, and how do you want them to differ from you? They're their own people. They can grow up how they want.

Do you believe in a god, or any form of religion? No god, and no religion. I am an old-fashioned, 19th-century style, proselytising atheist.

Would you like to alter anything about your appearance? Less flab.

What talent would you most like to have? Musical – I'd like to be able to play the piano.

Do you pay your poll tax? Yes.

What is your favourite joke? Q: 'Were you brought up at Eton?' A: 'No, I was eaten and brought up.'

What is your favourite meeting place? My kitchen.

Who do you most respect? Respect? What is respect? No man is a hero to his valet, and I come from the valet classes.

What would you die for? Nobody ever knows the answer to this until they find themselves in the firing line.

Which thinker has had most effect on your own personal philosophy? I don't have a personal philosophy. Life is too short to do anything except improvise.

Did you support the Gulf war? No, I totally opposed it.

What do you blame your parents for? Nothing.

Do you believe Page 3 should be banned? Why not keep Page 3 and ban the *Sun*?

Do you enjoy playing games? Yes – Ludo, draughts, and chess, sometimes. It gives my child such pleasure when I lose.

Do you give to charities? Which ones? Too personal a question. I do give to one or two, though.

You're driving through a hot, desolate expanse. What's playing on the stereo? Alan Bennett reading *Alice In Wonderland*.

Which politician do you find least unattractive? Trotsky, partly because he's dead. Dead politicians are best.

Who does the cleaning where you live? Not me, if I can help it. My partner, sometimes.

Do you think that creative writing courses are worthwhile? No.

Which films do you love and hate the most? Too many favourite films to count. I hated *Jules Et Jim* and *Persona*.

What tv do you watch to relax? Old movies.

Are you superstitious? Sort of. I hate to break mirrors.

Under what circumstances would you use private medicine? Possibly for a termination, because NHS policy is so widely varied on this. Nothing else.

Do you use public transport on a regular basis? Yes.

How happy are you with the filmed versions of your work? Very happy, especially with the cheques.

Where is your favourite holiday destination? Anywhere away from here.

Are your political allegiances the same now as they were when you were 18? Yes – sceptical Left.

What are your addictions? Newspapers.

Who cooks the meals in your house? Me.

If you couldn't do your current job, what would you do? Teach primary school. I like the company of small children.

Which film star do you dream about? Come off it, I'm 51 years old.

Which is your favourite city? Sheffield, before it changed.

What do you now own that you had never dreamt of having? A house, a car, a washing machine, a child.

What is the most amount of money you've spent on an item of clothing? £250, for an overcoat, four winters ago.

What hi-tech device scares you? Smart bombs.

Complete this sentence: If I were dictator for a day... I wouldn't be able to live with myself.

What do you no longer believe in? The 20th century.●

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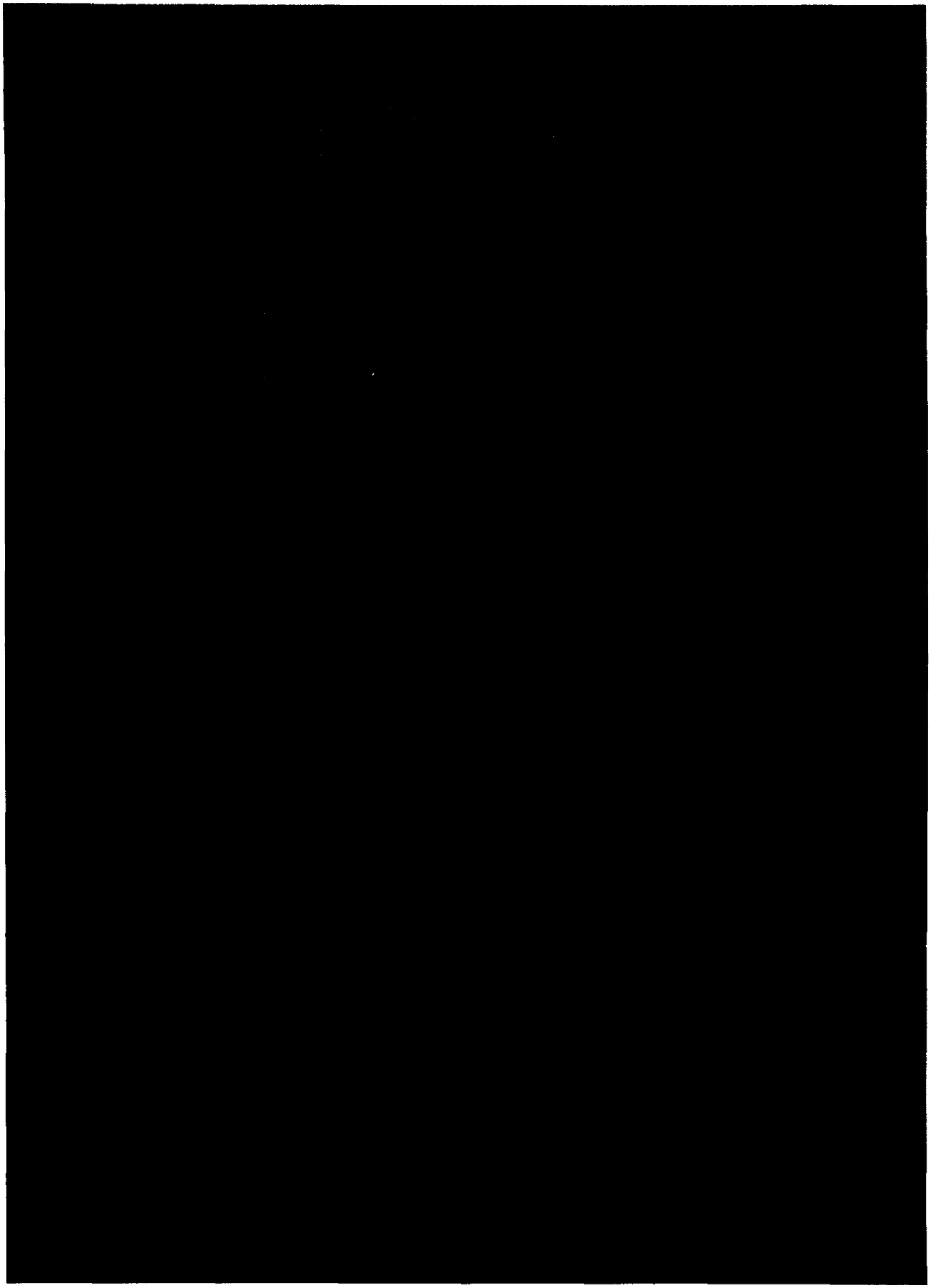

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